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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

VOICES OF CHANGE: EXPLORING THE NARRATIVES OF
PHYSICAL EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS' POLICY
WORK IN COLORADO

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Lisa Paulson

College of Natural and Health Sciences
Kinesiology, Nutrition, and Dietetics
Physical Education and Physical Activity Leadership

August 2024

This Dissertation by: Lisa Paulson

Entitled: *Voices of Change: Exploring the Narratives of Physical Education Stakeholders' Policy Work in Colorado*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in College of Natural and Health Sciences in School of Kinesiology, Nutrition, and Dietetics, Program of Physical Education and Physical Activity Leadership.

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ABSTRACT

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Quality physical education, pivotal for the development of physical, social, and emotional skills for an active and healthy lifestyle (Society of Health and Physical Educators [SHAPE] America, 2014; United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2021), has been globally marginalized, necessitating a heightened focus on policy advocacy engagement (Hardman, 2013; van der Mars, 2021). Policies touch nearly all aspects of physical education (UNESCO, 2014), and a significant barrier is the 'policy illiteracy' that contributes to the field's neglect (van der Mars et al., 2021). Many educators receive little to no policy education, often not identifying as policy actors (Lorusso et al., 2020). However, innovative approaches such as case stories are emerging in undergraduate programs to address policy education (Lorusso et al., 2023; Scanlon et al., 2022). While most literature is derived from outside the United States (Lambert & Penney, 2020; Penney, 2016), this area has garnered increased attention (van der Mars, 2018), yet empirical research remains scarce (Marttinen & Beighle, 2024). This study aimed to explore physical education stakeholders' policy work in the United States through the Narrative Policy Framework (Crow & Jones, 2018; Jones et al., 2022; Shanahan et al., 2015). Using a mixed-methodology approach, this study combines case study and narrative inquiry (Richmond, 2002) to explore the policy work of physical education stakeholders at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. Semi-structured interviews were conducted

($N = 15$), and additional qualitative data (e.g., policy documents and other artifacts) were collected ($N = 32$) to gain a comprehensive understanding of each case. Data collection began in December 2023 and continued through March 2024. Data were analyzed using both inductive narrative analysis (Riessman, 2010) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with triangulation across sources, participants, and cases (Patton, 1999). Findings suggest how strategic advocacy efforts can be effective in physical education work across micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. At the micro-level, themes of advocacy champions within and beyond school walls, redefining the role of physical educators, and navigating policy challenges shed light on the important role of individual efforts and school-community support in overcoming barriers. The meso-level analysis emphasized a “students first” advocacy focus, the rationalization for more resources, navigation of policy processes amidst battles of marginalization, and advocacy principles. At the macro-level, strategic coalition-building, a clear advocacy “ask” for improved access to quality physical education, and effective use of stories, data, and tailored messaging emphasize the importance of diverse, strategic coalitions and nuanced advocacy strategies in influencing state policy. This dissertation exposed the complexities of physical education policy advocacy at school, district, and state levels, highlighting the need for resilience, innovation, and the use of narratives as a powerful advocacy tool. Emphasizing the role of educators as policy actors and the effectiveness of storytelling supported by evidence, this study presented a compelling case for the integration of policy education within physical education teacher education (PETE) programs and/or professional development settings, as well as enhancing stakeholder engagement in policy endeavors to improve access and implementation of quality physical education in the United States. Thus, this work serves as a call to the field to embrace

their roles as policy actors and prioritize capacity-building for impactful policy advocacy for physical education.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When delivered effectively, quality physical education can support the development of physical, social, and emotional skills; essential competencies for individuals to lead active, healthy lives and be engaged members of society (Society of Health and Physical Educators [SHAPE] America, 2014; United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2021). Furthermore, UNESCO (2021) has recommended that “quality physical education, which is inclusive, child-centered and supported by specialized educators, should be reflected in national resilience and recovery plans” (p. 16). Yet, the field continues to battle against strains of marginalization (Hardman, 2013; van der Mars, 2021), as physical education’s potential is not being recognized by schools or universities worldwide (MacPhail & Lawson, 2020). The quality and sustainability of physical education, particularly at the secondary level in schools, have been questioned for many years, with no appreciative improvements (Locke & Siedentop, 1997). The historical pattern of marginalization in physical education can be attributed to several factors, including reduced funding, limited instructional time, and lower status than other academic subjects such as math, science, and reading (Richards et al., 2018). This marginalization is also influenced by the perception that physical education is less critical for academic development, demoting it to a secondary role in many educational systems (Sparkes et al., 1993).

While the need for prioritized attention on policy engagement by all physical education stakeholders has been acknowledged by many (Lorusso et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2021; van der

Mars, 2018; van der Mars et al., 2021), the field has a long history of neglecting policy caused by what van der Mars et al. (2021) refer to as ‘policy illiteracy’. In physical education where the policy profile is poor, there is quite a bit of variance. Policy literacy refers to the ability to understand and effectively engage with public policies, as well as the capacity to recognize the implications of policies and to navigate political processes. Policy literacy, specifically in the physical education space, is important as it enables individuals or groups to make informed decisions and advocate. Yet, many physical educators may not be aware of policies in their schools, such as graduation requirements for physical education or policies regulating class sizes to ensure appropriate student-to-teacher ratios.

Mitchell et al. (2021) identified strategies to increase awareness of physical education policy and literacy in an attempt to stimulate change. The promotion of robust policies requires a collective effort. Faculty in physical education teacher education (PETE) can collaborate with PK-12 educators to work toward significant policy changes and should incorporate education on policy and advocacy in their training of future teachers (Kahan et al., 2023). Examples of policy and advocacy education can involve participation in events like state-level or national speak out days, engaging in persuasive written assignments (e.g., letters to parent-teacher organizations or school boards), creating teaching philosophy statements, conducting interviews with administrators and/or other stakeholders in schools, and practicing various multimedia approaches (e.g., emails, website development, social media) for communicating physical education’s mission, policies, and practices to parents and/or families. In addition, faculty and students in PETE can identify sympathetic politicians and advocate for legislation to strengthen physical education. These examples are ways in which individuals can demonstrate policy literacy, an area that has been ignored in the physical education field (van der Mars et al., 2021).

Given that policies impact nearly all aspects of physical education (e.g., standards, content, instructional time, and practices; UNESCO, 2014), continuing to operate under subpar policies is not sustainable. Policy actors in physical education such as teachers, teacher educators, and other stakeholders are those who engage in advocacy initiatives (van der Mars et al., 2021) in helping to shape and implement policies. Although physical education stakeholders' desire to learn about policy engagement (Scanlon et al., 2022), many receive minimal, if any, policy education or preparation to participate in policy work and thus do not perceive themselves to be policy actors (Lorusso et al., 2020).

Despite heightened attention, most physical education policy research has been conducted outside of the United States (e.g., Lambert & Penney, 2020; Penney, 2016) and does not take into consideration the unique systems of governance within the country. To illustrate, in the United States there are roughly 13,000 independent school districts. Unique to the American tiered political structure (local, state, and federal government), the majority of school districts are permitted to establish their physical education curriculum while exercising authority within school-wide decisions without yielding to state or national influences or recommendations (Marttinen & Beighle, 2024). This adds to the complexities of policy work in the United States.

In addressing stakeholders' capacity for policy engagement, several barriers have been identified in the literature (e.g., competing demands, limited time, lack of incentive and/or opportunity; Lorusso et al., 2023; van der Mars et al., 2021). To learn more about barriers, facilitators for change, and overarching experiences in policy processes, it is beneficial to unpack stories from stakeholders who have engaged in policy work, particularly within the context of the United States. Recognizing narratives as a powerful vehicle for capturing attention to impact policy outcomes (Shanahan et al., 2015), the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) aims to analyze

and understand how policy narratives and stories influence decision-making and shape public policy at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels (Jones et al., 2022) and served as a foundation for this study.

Seeking to explore stakeholders' experiences and engagement in policy work within a United States context, the question posed within this dissertation was:

Q1 What are the stories and experiences of the stakeholders engaged in physical education policy work at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels?

Using the NPF, this research utilizes a combined approach, employing two qualitative methodologies (i.e., case study and narrative inquiry) to explore the phenomenon of policy work in the United States within a real-world context, bounded at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels, using multiple data sources (e.g., interviews, policy documents, and other archival sources) to gain a deep, rich insight about stakeholders' experiences and perspectives through stories (Caine & Clandinin, 2019).

Using an NPF lens, analysis of stakeholders' experiences and stories at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels in this study can shed light on how narratives mold policy perspectives and decisions. Moreover, in a time in which public policy is largely influenced by competing and conflicting narratives, this framework serves a pivotal role in understanding the construction of narratives and the preferences of their respective proponents (Jones et al., 2022). Considering the lack of policy engagement in the field of United States physical education, the complexities of its political system, and the urgent call for physical educators to serve as policy actors, more robust professional preparation for sustained pro-active advocacy across all levels of governance is warranted.

This study is significant as it endeavors to make meaning of stakeholders' experiences in policy work through stories, serving as a collection of real-world cases at micro-, meso-, and

macro-levels that convey the complexities of policy in reality. To reverse policy neglect and address challenges of misunderstandings of policy and its processes, as well as lack of training and/or preparation for policy work (Lorusso et al., 2023), gaining a comprehensive insight into stakeholders' triumphs, obstacles, and policy advocacy journeys is a step forward in breaking barriers for future policy actors to participate in this work. Uncovering the policy process within detailed narratives can aid in understanding the complexities of policy work and help build capacity for policy engagement. Furthermore, PETE programs serve as a primary context for learning about policy and advocacy (e.g., Marttinen & Beighle, 2024; Morrison & Lorusso, 2023; Penney, 2016; van der Mars et al., 2021), yet many teachers and teacher educators in the field continue to face resource constraints (e.g., budget, staffing, space, scheduling; Richards et al., 2018). Physical educators, teacher educators, and other stakeholders can collectively be agents of change to influence policy, and the results of this study may inform policy education within professional development and teacher preparation programs. In essence, this study's exploration of real-world narratives can serve as a foundation for breaking barriers and empowering future policy actors in paving the way for future policy work.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE) America (2015) defined physical education as an academic subject that “provides students with a planned, sequential, K-12 standards-based program of curricula and instruction designed to develop motor skills, knowledge and behaviors for active living, physical fitness, sportsmanship, self-efficacy, and emotional intelligence” (p. 3). Yet, policies directly impact curricula, instruction, and the quality of physical education programs. Notably, the intricacies of the policy process can be complex, as are efforts to define policy. While conversations about policy definitions invite controversy, policy within the scope of this dissertation, in line with previous public policy work (e.g., Scanlon et al., 2022) was defined as: “Any course of action (or inaction) relating to the selection of goals, the definition of values or the allocation of resources” (Olssen et al., 2012, p. 71). Olssen et al.’s definition of policy was appropriate for physical education policy research as in addition to policy actions, it speaks to inaction in policy work and processes. Such inaction has consequences, particularly in the field of physical education where advocacy efforts have been necessary for working to reverse what van der Mars et al. (2021) referred to as policy neglect, largely caused by the prevalence of policy illiteracy.

Defining and distinguishing the differences between recommendations and policies was important to frame the conversation around policy work in the U.S. A ‘statute’ is a single law that has passed through legislation within a state, and “laws take precedence over every other type of policy and are subject to the full weight of state enforcement via the criminal or civil

justice systems” (The National Association of Chronic Disease Directors [NACDD], National Association of State Boards of Education [NASBE], & SHAPE America, 2015, pp. 2-4). However, some legislation has included policy language that cannot be enforced, such as requiring the development of model policies without requirements of adherence. A “regulation” is a legal rule created by a state board or agency under the state legislature’s authority. A regulation can either put into effect a state law or, when no specific law exists, establish guidelines created by state agencies rather than lawmakers.

In addition to statutes and laws, state education and health boards, health advisory committees, and other state agencies have issued recommendations and guidance documents covering various topics, such as physical activity guidelines. Some of these policies have carried legal weight, while others are non-binding recommendations or model policies that have offered guidance for shaping local-level policies. In general, policy guidance documents and/or position statements have lacked legal enforceability unless the primary policy explicitly dictated their adoption. This approach has been particularly important in states with decentralized governance and localized decision-making, as it has allowed for adaptability and has established a foundational step toward potentially implementing legally binding policies, even in states with more centralized decision-making structures (NACDD, NASBE, & SHAPE America, 2015). Furthermore, the combination of legally binding and non-binding policies and recommendations, alongside diverse governance structures, has posed challenges for establishing and upholding accountable physical education policies. The disparities in enforceability have had potential to lead to inconsistencies, confusion, and difficulties in ensuring compliance and accountability across states, ultimately hindering the effectiveness of these policies.

In a field that has remained marginalized (Hardman, 2013; van der Mars et al., 2021), there has been a critical need for more physical educators, teacher educators, and other stakeholders to step up to serve as policy actors. Engagement in policy spaces has been impacted by knowledge of policy processes (Lorusso et al., 2020), and amidst a multi-level system in the United States, there has been a need to find ways to teach advocacy skills in moving toward policy literacy in the field (van der Mars et al., 2021). To ensure the complexities of reality have been reflected in teaching about policy, narratives across micro-, meso-, and macro-levels can provide rich detail and authentic context for developing advocacy skills (Morrison & Lorusso, 2023).

Navigating the Complexities of Policy

Quality physical education, essential to developing active and healthy members of society (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2021), has remained marginalized compared to other academic subject areas. The status of the field has been impacted by policies, which have provided direction and accountability at local, state, and national levels and have served as the foundation of the profession's ecology (van der Mars et al., 2021). Yet, determining whose job it is to serve as a policy actor has remained debatable, and unfortunately, many physical educators have not considered themselves policy actors (Lorusso et al., 2020).

To provide context, in the early 1980s, the rise and prevalence of childhood obesity prompted a paradigm shift as physical education reform began focusing on the benefits of lifelong physical activity (Penney, 2017). Over time, the physical education profession has attempted to advance beyond a multi-activity approach, and policy spaces have become more crowded and diverse among various pedagogical models, practices, and agendas (Petrie &

lisahunter, 2011). The presence of such varied perspectives has led to a lack of progress toward policy development, implementation, and change due to physical education's 'muddled vision' (van der Mars, 2021). Considering education and policy landscapes have been ever-changing among a variety of beliefs and values pertaining to physical education outcomes, there has not only been room for interpretation as to how outcomes should be accomplished, but also a lack of consensus for what policies should be in place (e.g., the number of instruction minutes, licensure requirements, allowance of substitutions, waivers, and exemptions). Though there has been progress in developing standards and assessments at the state level (Dauenhauer et al., 2019), it has been evident that stronger policies and appropriate practices need to be established and adhered to in schools to support quality physical education at all levels (SHAPE America, 2015).

Policy actors need to give careful consideration to what evidence may be most impactful in justifying the value of physical education. Advocates have argued for increased assessment and accountability in providing evidence of student outcomes, as the absence of reliable and valid assessments to measure learning and performance has meant that physical education teachers have been largely evaluated based on students' academic achievement test scores (van der Mars, 2018) as opposed to subject-specific outcomes. Not only are more cohesive conversations needed about assessment and accountability as it relates to advocacy but approaching policy work through a socio-critical lens is imperative for discussing what policies should look like. Posing a critical question when delving into physical education policy research in the United States, Landi et al. (2021) asked not, 'What is policy research?', but 'In what ways are policies working (or not) in different contexts, who is doing this work, and how is policy research conducted across the country?'

Policies are influenced by advocacy; it has been important to tailor efforts with considerations for varying values and perspectives. Although we may not reach a consensus for what the goals of physical education are or should be, perhaps we can progress to find common ground for defining policy problems, a vital facet for advancing policy research and practice, and for increasing advocacy efforts (Penney, 2017). Yet, meaningful, socially just contributions working to increase quality physical education have necessitated keeping equitable outcomes at the forefront of policy work. There must be a prioritization of equity, social justice, and the complexities of individuals' lived experiences in both the field and policy discussions. While respectful differences may have lingered in terms of defining policy and who should be engaged, there has been agreement that more policy actors are needed.

Policy Matters

Policies have had the potential to impact various aspects of physical education like standards, curricula, and instructional methods (UNESCO, 2014). Therefore, active engagement in policy advocacy is of utmost significance. More so, policies and policy advocacy are important to the field due to continued deep marginalization. Dating back three decades ago, Sparkes et al. (1993) expressed concerns about physical education's low status within the school curriculum as compared to other subject areas, pointing out issues such as class sizes and inappropriate student-to-teacher ratios. Additionally, in their 1997 paper, Locke and Siedentop offered a historical context that continues to resonate in today's policy landscape. The authors noted that legislators continue to question the requirements of physical education, and surprisingly, many have accepted the notion of merely maintaining a presence in the schools as a triumph, rather than striving to strengthen curricula (Locke & Siedentop, 1997). Regrettably, the state of policy advocacy has remained largely unaltered.

In the past, teachers played a critical role in shaping curriculum in one-room schoolhouses (Tyack & Cuban, 1997). The responsibility for policy and decision-making in the American education system has always been the job of politicians (Apple, 2012), due to local control. It is important to note that strides have been made in education within the United States, such as the passing of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. Previously, No Child Left Behind (2002) focused efforts on education reform by prioritizing high-stakes standardized testing and associated accountability policies related to teacher evaluation. When ESSA (U.S. Department of Education, 2015) was passed in 2015, it revised the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, but this time emphasized the importance of students' well-rounded education. In addition to math and reading, this reauthorization prioritized the arts, physical education, health education, civics, technology education, and more, recognizing the need for students to have access to a broad and rich curriculum (Harris, 2015). When other subject areas were elevated, it opened more opportunities and access to program funding in an attempt to balance the playing field, marking a significant turning point for progress in the field.

As the education policy landscape has evolved, it has been essential to consider the ways specific policies and recommendations have shaped physical education policy. The United States has a tiered policy system in which the federal government develops and implements policies at local, state, and national levels. The constitution stipulates that the federal government should not interfere with how education is conducted, and thus, leaves educational decisions to states and districts. Considering local control within this tiered system, policies can differ quite extensively as compared to national recommendations. To provide an environment that enables all students in PK-12 schools to receive physical education with clear outcomes, SHAPE America (2014) has provided specific physical education recommendations for policy.

According to SHAPE America, every student should attend daily physical education classes totaling 150 minutes per week at the elementary level and 225 minutes per week at the secondary level. School districts and individual schools should have requirements for all students to have physical education and should not allow exemptions from physical education class time or credit requirements. Furthermore, schools should not allow for substitutions of other physical activity programs, such as marching band or interscholastic sports participation, to replace physical education class time or credit requirements. In their position statement, SHAPE America (2021) also contends that the use of physical activity as a form of punishment and/or behavior management is an inappropriate practice; while unfortunately, the use of exercise as punishment in physical education has often been observed amongst teachers in the field (Burak et al., 2013). To ensure quality, physical education should be taught by a state-licensed or state-certified physical education teacher who sustains licensure or certification by engaging in continuing professional development opportunities (SHAPE America, 2015).

According to SHAPE America (2016), an ongoing challenge in the field of physical education has been the range of governmental activity within states and consequently, high variations of state policies and execution. While much of the existing literature about physical education policy in the last 20 years has focused on the number of minutes designated to physical education (Burson et al., 2021), Keating et al. (2010) noted significant increases in state-level standards yet mandates for class sizes and graduation requirements did not improve. Likewise, Dauenhauer et al. (2019) found increased adoption of state standards and assessment requirements but exposed continued marginalization of physical education due to lack of curricular time and inappropriate substitution policies.

Understanding the impact of policy as it relates to continued marginalization in the education system, not just in the United States, but globally has been important for moving the needle in the profession (Hardman, 2013). According to Doyle's (1979) ecological task structure framework, the field's status remained low due to accepting current practices, meaning that physical educators who do little beyond keeping students safe and supervised do so because they are not held accountable (van der Mars, 2021). Though there are several guidance documents, position statements, and national recommendations suggesting policy, issues in the field will not improve unless stronger policies are put in place, especially at the state and local levels (van der Mars, 2018). To move toward stronger state and local policies, it is important that physical educators, PETE faculty, and other stakeholders not only are aware of existing policies at state and national levels but also understand how policies relate to recommendations for physical education. While policy and advocacy represent fundamental tools for addressing marginalization (Lux & McCullick, 2011), the appropriate scope for engaging in this work has remained up for debate.

Policy Research Insights

Most policy research has occurred outside of the United States (e.g., Lambert & Penney, 2020; Penney, 2016). While there has been increased attention on policy and advocacy in recent years with scholars advocating for physical education to make a sustainable impact (van der Mars, 2018), such efforts have not typically been grounded in empirical research (Marttinen & Beighle, 2024). Regarding physical education curriculum, Ball and Junemann (2012) have contributed to physical education policy literature stressing that relationships are essential for pursuing how certain discourses become credible or 'natural' within curriculum discussions. Penney (2017) indicated that there was a lack of contemporary and empirical understanding

related to who was making such connections by being involved in formal curriculum policy. Additionally, there was a need for further examination of curriculum reform policy actors' relationships. Moreover, Petrie (2019) called for a shift in practice to ensure that such reforms are approached through a process that meets the needs of teachers.

In the United States, it is important to account for the ways policies exist at multiple levels, and thus, policy actors' roles within each level. Lawson (2018) distinguished between efforts targeted at federal and state levels as "Big P" and efforts aiming to impact policy at district and school levels as "Little p." In physical education policy spaces, policy actors should consider how they can advocate at both levels (van der Mars et al., 2021). Lawson's (2018) concept was important to this dissertation as the researcher explored cases across micro-, meso-, and macro-levels, and thus, related to actors serving at "Big P" and "Little p" levels. Lawson (2018) illustrated the interactions between various stakeholders and policy actors while differentiating between each level as "Big P" refers to state and federal level efforts, while "little p" alludes to more local efforts.

To establish state-wide accountability for physical education programs through the implementation of standards, development of assessment resources, and work toward policy changes, Rink et al. (2002) addressed the implementation of high-stakes assessment in physical education for the state of South Carolina. Upon high schools submitting student performance data, a monitoring committee analyzed the data, and results were reported to the Department of Education and administrators, with each school earning a grade based on the percentage of students who met state standards. Physical education reform in South Carolina began in 1994 when state legislation mandated student outcomes and state standards were developed, modified from National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) content standards. The

reform encompassed training for teachers, curriculum and instruction alignment, and encouragement of intentional and comprehensive units (Rink et al., 2002). Because of these efforts, physical education became a tested academic subject in the state (Rink & Mitchell, 2003).

More recently, Zhang (2023) conducted a study to understand how physical educators experienced a teacher-accountable reform within a United States context and aimed to explore the reform as part of a larger system of 'neoliberal governance'. Upon examining 51 North Carolina teachers' perceptions and reactions, Zhang found that teachers generally tried to protect their programs by embracing assessment, yet noticed issues with the ways assessments reduced the complexity of learning in physical education through questionable measures, and teachers encountered significant disparities as the accountability system was associated with different rules for 'tested' and 'non-tested' subject areas. It was suggested that teachers and researchers should endeavor to establish creative and meaningful ways to quantify student learning in physical education, recognizing the values of the subject area beyond accountability systems (Zhang, 2023).

Likewise, strides have been made in the state of Ohio for physical education policies through advocacy efforts. Lorson and Mitchell (2016) shared that through the passage of Senate Bill 210 in 2010, the 'Healthy Choices for Healthy Children Act', assessments were developed for each physical education benchmark aiming at addressing childhood obesity. Seeking to understand teachers' perceptions about the impact of the assessments, the authors collected survey data and found mixed results, noting that state-mandated assessments could facilitate change, yet long-term impacts related to accountability, curriculum, and pedagogy will take time (Lorson & Mitchell, 2016). Additionally, Sutherland and Walton-Fisette (2022) shared their

critical reflection on Ohio's policy work and the impact of state-mandated standards, curricula, teaching, and assessment. In their paper, the authors shed light on tensions between balancing the development of equitable curriculum and methods, particularly related to recent legislative actions within and beyond the education sector. Acknowledging the need for more progress to be made, Sutherland and Walton-Fisette (2022) have committed to re-orienting their work to prioritize equity and social justice across levels through intra-active policy work in Ohio, their home state, by being at the table for meaningful conversations and the next iteration of standards, benchmarks, and assessments to impact the enactment of curriculum through formal policy.

The work in South Carolina, North Carolina, and Ohio has highlighted a few of the many challenges in implementing legislated assessments related to teacher training, discrepancies in assessment methods, and the need for re-orienting policies to ensure social justice and equity, yet these extensive advocacy efforts have provided an example of how our colleagues have engaged in policy work with a positive impact.

A potential partnership in advocacy efforts for physical education, organizations such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), World Health Organization (WHO), and UNESCO have issued recommendations to enhance physical activity levels for youth within and beyond physical education. This notion of achieving 60 minutes of daily physical activity is not new, as many states have adopted frameworks such as Comprehensive School Physical Activity Programs to provide access to physical activity opportunities before, during, and after school to help meet the recommendation (Carson et al., 2020). In addition, van der Mars (2021) stated that physical education's competitors could be youth sports, personal trainers, and coaches, while also suggesting that they can act as partners with similar goals to develop physically active, skillful movers. With the health and well-being of children at the forefront, Sallis et al. (2012)

recommended that fields of education and public health work together with policymakers to enhance contributions to physical activity. Sallis et al. (2012) further indicated that many public health groups have embraced the concept of health-optimizing physical education (HOPE), but very few education professionals have done so.

Further, in their 2013 paper, McKenzie and Lounsbery took a comprehensive approach to assessing teacher effectiveness in a public health context. Emphasizing the expanded role of physical educators as physical activity leaders, the authors argued that because lifelong physical activity promotion is/should be a critical goal of the curriculum, teachers need to be held accountable for providing evidence of physical activity outcomes and failing to do so weakens the influence that schools can have in public health. As exercise can be considered medicine, McKenzie and Lounsbery (2013) referred to physical education in schools as ‘the pill not taken’ as they advocate for the field’s contributions toward decreasing sedentary behaviors and increasing health-related outcomes and suggest that more cohesive discussions related to the mission of physical education can aid in future advocacy efforts and politicking skills. Acknowledging the effectiveness of collective efforts, van der Mars (2018) suggested that kinesiologists and public health researchers have a common goal, and stronger collaboration could improve advocacy efforts.

Though the physical education field has national guidance documents outlining several recommendations, as well as evidence supporting best practices related to physical education pedagogies (SHAPE America, 2014, 2015), marginalization of the profession has persisted. To illustrate an important point, van der Mars (2018) discussed what can be learned from advocacy efforts to reduce smoking and the tobacco industry’s influence on the public’s health. In the United States, during the 1960s, tobacco use was at an all-time high. Yet, after the United States

Surgeon General's Report on Smoking was published (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 1964), smoking behaviors declined dramatically (USDHHS, 2014). To reverse the trend, providing strong evidence related to the major health risks associated with smoking (e.g., emphysema, lung cancer, addiction) was key to changing policy and behavior. Not only have several laws been passed preventing individuals from smoking in public spaces, but anti-smoking campaigns have evolved and the efforts to pass such policy have been extremely effective. As van der Mars (2018) suggested, physical education policy actors can learn lessons from examples such as this by not only considering pairing with public health advocates through collective efforts but in leaning on the best available evidence to deeply impact policy development and policy advocacy. For instance, in their policy brief, UNESCO (2021) made a case for physical education policy development related to inclusion. The document provided evidence by drawing on findings from studies related to interventions in the United States, as well as post-COVID recovery efforts. Following the evidence and rationale, several recommendations for policy tailored to various stakeholder groups in promoting inclusive and quality physical education for all students were provided (UNESCO, 2021). More policy briefs and advocacy efforts like these are needed to advance the field.

In the context of physical education policy work at the state level, McMullen and Rogers (2020) described the efforts and impact that SHAPE Colorado had upon increasing advocacy efforts to improve physical education in the state. The organization increased policy-related content on its website, engaged in lobby days, and most significantly, a grant was secured through the passage of House Bill 19-1161, allowing for the physical education pilot program to be implemented. The bill provided funding for schools to implement a physical education model policy to enhance programs and included an evaluation component to measure impact. The

preliminary success of coalition-building and ongoing advocacy in this has served as an example for other state-level efforts, highlighting the importance of physical education policy and advocacy (McMullen & Rogers, 2020).

Examples of state-level advocacy efforts and advances in establishing state-wide accountability may sound promising; yet “state P.E. laws are as effective as the schools and school districts that implement them” (An et al., 2021, p. 285). Physical education objectives, such as physical activity, fitness, motor skills, and social-emotional development, necessitate sufficient class time, with recommended guidelines of 150 minutes/week for elementary and 225 minutes/week for secondary schools. However, deficits in class time allocation, especially in elementary and middle schools, have been shown in past research (Kahan et al., 2023). While some states have policies, compliance varies, robust policy language matters, and top-down legislation does not always ensure execution due to resource and accountability issues. Kahan et al. (2023) conducted a study that examined the impact of a lawsuit on physical education policy adherence in California schools. Four years after the lawsuit, district websites continued to post physical education information, but the proportion of school websites adhering to policy mandates decreased substantially. Though there was a temporary positive effect due to the lawsuit intervention, the impact was not permanent. Overall, the authors found that schools typically regard state regulations related to physical education minutes as temporary and do not enforce adherence. As a result, such policies have been likely ignored. While giving due consideration to the development, execution, and compliance with physical education policies, it is essential to approach these efforts with a focus on equity.

Vital to note, Walton-Fisette and Sutherland (2020) discussed the importance of adopting a socially just perspective in the next rendition of SHAPE America physical education content

standards. Working to ensure that “all young people have a right to equitable opportunities in physical education as a form of personal, physical, and social development” (Landi et al., 2021, p. 58), policy research must have equity and social justice at the forefront. In their contributions, the authors also mentioned that policy research agendas should be guided by physical educators and suggest that re-orienting the field’s policy agenda with an equity-focused approach has the potential to address the complexities and lived experiences of individuals in the field, and in the policy arena (Landi et al., 2021).

Progress related to policy work has been slow, particularly in the United States, and van der Mars et al. (2021) urged everyone to consider themselves policy actors as the physical education field cannot afford to wait. In the call for more actors, efforts to understand engagement in policy have been useful in working to educate and socialize future advocates. Though there has been a lack of empirical literature in the physical education policy space, there have been key actors in the field working to make strides. Acknowledging continued marginalization in the field, increased attention has been placed on physical educators, teacher educators, and other stakeholders to serve as policy actors, as past literature points to the need for moving toward policy literacy, such as developing policy awareness and capacity, increasing opportunities to learn about policy through professional development (e.g., conferences), and integrating policy into PETE programs to socialize pre-service teachers and graduate students into their role as policy actors (van der Mars et al., 2021). Alfrey et al. (2017) emphasized the need for future research, stressing that a ‘policy turn’ and revitalizing an emphasis on policy within current scholarship can contribute to progress in policy work.

Lastly, in their recent scoping review, Scanlon et al. (2023) aimed to map out the state of policy research in school-based physical education internationally, covering studies from 2010 to

2020. Their findings not only provide insight into the current research landscape but shed light on the need for a more nuanced understanding of policy research within the physical education field. Guiding future work, the authors suggested the importance of embracing a comprehensive approach to policy analysis and scholarship in hopes of better equipping future researchers and practitioners for policy advocacy and implementation in the field of physical education (Scanlon et al., 2023).

Embracing Stories to Equip Future Actors

Physical education pre-service teachers are the future of the profession, thus making teacher preparation programs a logical place for learning about the importance of policy and advocacy (Marttinen & Beighle, 2024; Morrison & Lorusso, 2023; Penney, 2016; van der Mars et al., 2021). Physical education teacher education faculty can play an important role in the enactment of policy (Penney, 2016) as they prepare candidates for teaching, they also have an opportunity to prepare them for their role as policy actors (Marttinen & Beighle, 2024; van der Mars et al., 2021). In their recent paper, Morrison and Lorusso (2023) discussed the role of persuasive storytelling in instilling advocacy skills in pre-service teachers. Acknowledging the common issue of teachers commonly being excluded from policy-making discussions, the authors emphasized the need for physical educators to share their perspectives and “advocacy rants” in not only working to shape policies and practice but to engage pre-service teachers in policy work by hearing persuasive stories (Morrison & Lorusso, 2023). Regarding the need for training for both pre-and in-service teachers, the integration of policy education in PETE is called for, as preparation to engage in policy change and advocacy has remained scarce in physical education (Lorusso et al., 2020).

Lorusso et al. (2020) examined content, key facilitators, and barriers related to stakeholders' capacity to engage in policy work to meet the demand for more policy actors in the field. Their findings not only pointed to commonly faced barriers identified elsewhere in the literature (e.g., van der Mars et al., 2021) but also highlighted misunderstandings of policy as a key barrier. There has been, for example, the need to reevaluate perspectives of policy engagement, and the potential benefits of socialization, like extending invitations and encouraging others to get involved. Lorusso et al. (2023) also recommended that such education can occur through relationships and that language can be connected by sharing cases or stories. Utilizing narratives as an educational tool can be effective for imparting advocacy skills in pre-service teachers while lifting the voices of physical educators to impact policy and practice. Additionally, in their study, Scanlon et al. (2022) explored conceptualizations and practices of policy work in health and physical education and suggested the need for more policy-related professional development, as well as the need to decrease the language gaps between teacher and teacher educators in interprofessional spaces. Lorusso et al. (2020) also noted that despite the importance of policy work being acknowledged in the field, many do not see themselves as policy actors. The authors concluded by suggesting that one way policy education can be integrated into undergraduate programs is through the use of stories and/or case studies (Lorusso et al., 2023; Scanlon et al., 2022).

In a recent chapter by Weaver (2024) on using cases to teach about public policy, the effectiveness of real-world stories or cases was discussed as a way to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application to help students obtain a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in policy work. The narratives within cases have been shown to equip future policy actors by pointing to the importance of considering potential challenges, various

stakeholder perspectives, and other issues they may encounter when engaging in public policy. Weaver (2024) suggested that the use of case stories can help students develop analytical skills to prepare them for real-world situations by encouraging active learning and critical thinking, essential skills for navigating the complexities and nuances of policy advocacy and implementation.

Because policy is enacted by teachers, they are by definition key policy actors themselves and it is critical to recognize that the primary agents for policy implementation are teachers (Day et al., 2007; Marttinen & Beighle, 2024). Moreover, it has also been important to understand teacher's educational values, beliefs, and philosophies as they relate to their role as policy actors (Alfrey et al., 2017). Thus, collecting stories from teachers and stakeholders in the trenches can shed light on not only the raw details of policy advocacy processes but the complexities of reality when engaging in this work. Rooted in the narrative policy framework (NPF), the combining of evidence with storytelling has shown to be an effective advocacy strategy (Crow & Jones, 2018).

The Narrative Policy Framework

For centuries the significance of human stories for learning, communication, and comprehension (e.g., Polkinghorne, 1988) has been emphasized in the literature. Formally named the Portneuf School of Narrative in 2010, the NPF initially focused on seeking to understand the relationship between policy processes and narratives (Crow & Jones, 2018), recognizing narratives as powerful vehicles for capturing attention and impacting policy outcomes (Shanahan et al., 2015). Drawing on the model and framework of Elinor Ostrom (2011), this framework has aimed to identify, structure, and understand concepts and their interactions with other concepts within policy processes (Jones et al., 2022). Encompassing various policy-related concepts (e.g., policy narratives, coalitions, institutions), NPF primarily has served the purpose of organizing

relationships between those concepts to help scholars and policymakers create explanations for public policy. Further drawing on the work of Lakatos from the 1970s to understand scientific research, Jones et al. (2022) developed five assumptions. First, the *social construction of policy realities* has ensured that the researcher recognized that, while reality was independent of one's ability to perceive it, the perceptions of that reality have been what mattered for public policy. Second, *bounded relativity* has been explained as the way that individuals perceived their surroundings and acknowledged that interpretations of objects, ideas, and relationships can differ, leading to diverse policy perspectives. Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) has assumed that the interpretations were not unlimited nor random, and meaning making has been constrained by a systematic approach to how people make sense of their beliefs, identities, or organizational strategies. Third, there was the assumption of *narrative generalizability*, which has explained that narratives have measurable and identifiable components, such as characters, plot, setting, etc., and the researcher can categorize narratives across different policy contexts. The fourth assumption was included using *three levels of analysis* (i.e., micro-, meso-, and macro-). The NPF has assumed that there is interaction between the three levels during analysis. The micro-level centers around the narratives of individuals, whereas the meso-level focuses on narratives of groups and/or coalitions, and the macro-level captures overarching narratives of institutions or cultures, which can establish conceptual limits for cases at each level. Integrating theories and research from various disciplines, the NPF has claimed that narratives have served as the primary method through which individuals process information, engage in reasoning, and communicate (Jones et al., 2022), leading to the assumption of *homo narrans*. This assumption means that people have tended to prefer to speak and think in the form of a story (Shanahan et al., 2018).

Scholars have used NPF to study the role of narrative in policy (McBeth et al., 2014). For instance, Jeon and Haider-Markel (2001) conducted a study to demonstrate how changing a narrative about disabilities resulted in a policy shift. These types of examples in NPF research have been cited as they illustrate how narratives can be more powerful than science in shaping the perspectives of decision-makers (McBeth et al., 2014), elevating the use of narratives in policy work. In the education policy arena, NPF was used by Ertas (2019) to study how policy narratives impacted public opinion in charter schools in a study at the micro-level. The researcher exposed participants to various narratives to examine how narratives can help to shape public opinion. Ertas's findings suggested uncertain, yet supportive shifts in individual beliefs regarding the topic of charter schools.

Policy is complex by nature and invites the potential for relationships to several theories. For instance, Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of *legitimate peripheral participation* can aid in understanding how individuals learn through engaging in communities of practice. In the policy space, constructs of this framework can explain how people engage in policy work, often starting at the periphery (e.g., observation, minimal involvement) prior to taking on a more central role. Starting with a less demanding role can allow people to be more receptive to participating in policy; over time, gradual learning takes place through actual practice and people develop competence and a sense of confidence, leading to increased engagement (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Although engaging in peripheral participation can be an effective way to gain insights about the complexities of the policy process, interpret policy, and craft personal messages and/or responses, the barrier to entry for policy engagement persists. For instance, according to Aydarova et al. (2022), participants shared their experience of 'jumping in' and described

entrance to policy as one that required confidence and courage related to obtaining the necessary dispositions to engage meaningfully in policy conversations.

In addition, limitations and barriers will inevitably be faced when making policy decisions. Policy actors may need to navigate processes when given incomplete information, may have limited time, may have to deal with cognitive constraints, etc. Thus, Cairney (2012) shared how the “theory of bounded rationality” can explain how policy actors might make simplified choices and take shortcuts when making advocacy decisions, especially when needing to act fast in a complex, multi-level environment (Cairney et al., 2016). In this theory, it is posited that humans work within the bounds of rationality which impacts choices and advocacy efforts. Lastly, seeing as this dissertation was focused on exploring stakeholders’ experiences and engagement in policy work in the United States, the “theory of policy entrepreneurship” related closely as policy entrepreneurs see themselves as actors who can impact change. These individuals and/or groups of policy actors identify opportunities, frame issues in a persuasive manner, and navigate political spaces to advance agendas. Mintrom and Norman (2009) discussed the four elements of policy entrepreneurship: exhibiting social awareness, the ability to define policy problems, building teams, and leading and modeling through example.

While other theoretical frameworks were related to the topic of this dissertation and were considered during analyses, the NPF proved to be the best fit due to its alignment with the specific research aims of this study. Since this framework explained how narratives are constructed, communicated, and received by various actors, it serves as a foundation for organizing and interpreting the stories shared. Using narratives, consumers can make sense of complex problems, accounting for causal explanations, moral evaluations, and cultural meanings based on an individual’s values and beliefs (Shanahan et al., 2018). This theory helped to explore

how narratives shape perceptions of policy and influence decision-making while establishing appropriate assumptions aligned with the purpose and processes of this dissertation. Upon analysis at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels, NPF can develop an understanding of how narratives and persuasive storytelling might influence future physical education policy actors by equipping them with real-world advocacy skills to advocate for change in the field. Jones et al. (2022) suggested that in an era in which public policy was impacted by competing narratives, this framework played a pivotal role in understanding the creation of narratives, how various narratives have been preferred, and who has preferred them.

Summary

This study aimed to explore physical education stakeholders' policy work in the United States through the Narrative Policy Framework (Crow & Jones, 2018; Jones et al., 2022; Shanahan et al., 2015). The review of literature offered context for understanding the complexities of policy, a policy definition, the importance of policy and advocacy for the field of physical education, some of the major policy work conducted so far, and the intended contribution of this dissertation.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to explore stakeholders' experiences and engagement in physical education policy work in the United States. In this chapter, a detailed description of the research question, research design, participants and procedures, data collection, and execution of this dissertation are presented. Upon providing explanations of case study and narrative approaches separately, the rationale is presented for using a combined methodological approach for understanding the narratives and supporting evidence in each case.

Research Question

To explore stakeholders' experiences and engagement in policy work within a United States context, the following question provided direction for the study:

- Q1 What are the stories and experiences of stakeholders engaged in physical education policy work at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels?

Research Design

The NPF emphasizes the role of narratives in policy work (Jones & McBeth, 2010). This framework focuses on three levels of analysis (i.e., micro-, meso-, and macro-) and suggests that the three levels interact with each other (Crow & Jones, 2018). At the micro-level, the focus is on the individual, aiming to understand how individual beliefs, experiences, and stories can impact policy decisions. The meso-level examines narratives within specific groups, considering how collective narratives can shape policy and advocacy efforts. Lastly, the macro-level is centered around broader societal narratives, including the role of institutions or cultures (Shanahan et al.,

2018). Using the NPF, this research utilizes a combined approach, employing two qualitative methodologies (i.e., case study and narrative inquiry). A case study approach was used in this study to explore the phenomenon of policy work in the United States within a real-world context, bounded at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels using multiple data sources (e.g., interviews, policy documents, emails, social media posts, other archival sources, etc.). The use of narrative inquiry complemented the case study approach to be able to gain deep and rich insight into stakeholders' experiences toward understanding the storied phenomenon, and the individuals themselves as narrators (Caine & Clandinin, 2019).

Case Study

Yin (2018) described case study as an empirical investigation of a phenomenon from a real-world perspective. Case studies involve the collection of a variety of data that allow for in-depth exploration of a topic (Yin, 2018). Similarly, Creswell (2014) suggested that case study research examines programs, occurrences, processes, activities, or one or multiple people using an in-depth qualitative design. In the field of physical education, the use of case studies remains scarce, yet there are common approaches in related fields of study (e.g., medicine).

Cases are bound by both time and action as the researcher collects intricate and detailed information using diverse forms of data collection over an extended period around a single person or setting (Creswell, 2014). For this study, data were collected from multiple sources at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels and included interviews and artifacts (e.g., policy documents) as critical data sources. Aiming to explore stakeholders' stories about engagement in policy work in the United States, this dissertation sought to explore not only participant experiences but also the process by which they engage in policy efforts and how participants take on the role of policy actors (or not). While the case study approach aids in the contextualization

and boundedness of participants across each level, another methodological approach was necessary to explore and unpack the meanings behind the stories told by the participants.

Narrative Inquiry

Each case was comprised of stories and the addition of narrative inquiry methodology was useful for arranging and interpreting the stories within each case. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) coined the term narrative inquiry, which was rooted in Dewey's theory of experience (Clandinin, 2019). Connelly and Clandinin (2006) set the foundation for narrative inquiry by stating:

Arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry come out of a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. People shape their daily lives with stories of who they and others are, and they interpret their past in terms of these stories. (p. 477)

Therefore, a story is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) shared how this approach helps in understanding who the people are as narrators of their stories and about their role as policy actors. In storytelling, narrative inquiry expects that people will employ context to frame their experiences through reflection. In addition, it is acknowledged that writing about narratives involves meaning making and reflexivity that relates to themes and insights that emerge throughout the process (Srivastava & Thomson, 2009).

A Combined Strategy

The combination of case study and narrative inquiry was employed to best align with the aims of this dissertation, relying on case stories collected and analyzed using narrative inquiry methods (Richmond, 2002). A mixed-methods approach was a good fit for this work as beyond

understanding each stakeholder's experience of engaging in policy work within bounded cases, deriving meaning of the narrators themselves calls for narrative inquiry to complement the case study methodology. An important consideration as a rationale for expanding outside of case study was related to the structure of the interview process. A structured interview would answer many questions. However, this level of structure for collecting concise and organized information about a specific point would not uncover the thoughts and feelings of the stakeholders and their experiences. The use of a few probing open-ended interview questions allowed participants to share their stories of who they are as individuals and how that shaped their experiences.

Supporting this rationale, Sondag et al. (2020) explained how combining case study and narrative inquiry can serve as an innovative approach to conducting qualitative research. They described how merging the two methodological frameworks made a significant contribution to exposing the realities of the occupational therapy profession. The authors of this paper discussed the integration of a merged approach applied to a doctoral thesis about occupational therapy showing the relationship between structure and capacity for action within lived stories. The case narrative within the thesis focused on a single case that portrayed how professional roles transition in specialized school-level education contexts. The case served as an example of how case study acknowledged the various layers involved with the process of professional role transitions. Simultaneously, by embedding narrative inquiry, the emerging identities of occupational therapists were clarified (Sondag et al., 2020).

This combined methodology has been used elsewhere to strengthen research methods (e.g., Egitim, 2022; McQuaid et al., 2023; Richmond, 2002). For instance, Egitim (2022) conducted a narrative case study about international faculty members' experiences in adapting to

organizational culture. In gaining insight as to how participants' experiences were conveyed through stories, the author recognized that while a case study approach offered a way to understand the context, it lacked the tools to describe and explain the individuals' experiences. Thus, the author included the narrative element in the study, as it contributed thick descriptions of the stories, thoughts, and feelings within the context. Offering a novel way of documenting stories and experiences, combining case study with narrative inquiry can be a valuable way of conducting qualitative research, and serve as the approach for the current study in exploring not only stakeholders' policy-related experiences but also who they are as policy actors, helping to reflect the complexities of policy work in the real world.

Participants and Procedures

Before the initiation of the study, approval from the university's Institutional Review Board was obtained (see Appendix A). Information-rich cases at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels were selected using purposive sampling (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), including various stakeholders (e.g., K-12 physical educators, PETE faculty, state-level politicians, administrators, classroom teachers, district leadership, etc.). Snowball sampling was an important strategy as the stakeholders who were initially recruited knew and recommended others who could provide further rich and in-depth information and different perspectives within each case to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The following steps were followed for participant recruitment:

1. Identified exemplar cases of policy work in the United States.
2. Developed a list of individuals who have been involved in policy work in the United States as potential participants. Knowledge of policy actors will originate from the author's network in service, research, social media, and education.

3. Categorized the list into micro-, meso-, and macro-levels as potential cases.
4. Developed an initial letter including information about the aims of the project, the range of data sources to be collected, and potential time commitments (see Appendix B).
5. Recruited via email- stakeholders' emails were located through publicly available records or personal connections.
6. Narrowed the list to three in-depth cases (i.e., micro-, meso-, and macro-) based on initial communication regarding interest, willingness to participate, diverse cultures and backgrounds, and alignment with the research question and aims of this research.

The number of participants within each case varied, ranging from three to seven stakeholders at each level until data saturation was achieved. A total of 15 stakeholders across three cases participated in the study. Table 1 outlines the participants' characteristics within each case.

Case Selection

The research team initially considered cases from across the United States, but then were able to identify three promising cases within the same state using the recruitment steps listed above, after communicating with stakeholders around the country. Upon identifying an exemplary case at each level, the researcher considered the benefits and drawbacks of including cases from three different states versus one state. The benefits outweighed the drawbacks in choosing three cases within one state (e.g., knowledge of policy landscape, potential for in-person interviews, and access to participants), which ultimately provided rich and diverse cases for this study. Detailed information about each participant will be provided in the Findings Chapter.

Table. 1*Participant Characteristics*

Participant Pseudonym	Title/Role	Age Range	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Level
Alex	Elementary Physical Educator	35-44 years	Male	White/Caucasian	Micro
Samantha	Elementary Dean of Students; Parent	35-44 years	Female	White/Caucasian	Micro
Susan	Elementary Classroom Teacher; Parent	35-44 years	Female	White/Caucasian	Micro
Nancy	District PE/Health Curriculum Facilitator	35-44 years	Female	White/Caucasian	Meso
Paula	Secondary Physical Educator	55-64 years	Female	White/Caucasian	Meso
Janelle	Secondary Physical Educator	55-64 years	Female	White/Caucasian	Meso
Tyler	District Chief Institutional Effectiveness Officer	35-44 years	Male	White/Caucasian	Meso
Julia	District Science Curriculum Facilitator	45-54 years	Female	White/Caucasian	Meso
Paige	Associate Professor, past president of state organization	35-44 years	Female	White/Caucasian	Macro
Joyce	Retired Physical Educator, past-president of state organization	55-64 years	Female	White/Caucasian	Macro
James	Physical Educator; Executive Director of state organization	44-55 years	Male	White/Caucasian	Macro
Kelsey	Policy Consultant	35-44 years	Female	White/Caucasian	Macro
Jordan	Physical Education Curriculum and Instruction Specialist	35-44 years	Female	White/Caucasian	Macro
Leah	Prevention, Education, and Outreach Manager at a Children's Hospital	65+ years	Female	White/Caucasian	Macro
Senator Miller	State Senator	65 + years	Female	Black/African American	Macro

Data Collection

Multiple data sources were used to explore stakeholders' experiences and engagement in policy work in Colorado. In addition to exploring narratives, researchers in public policy have relied on other data sources. For this study, the following data sources were used: Interviews and artifacts (e.g., policy documents, social media posts, photos, etc.).

Interviews

Upon obtaining informed consent (see Appendix C), individual interviews and/or focus group interviews were conducted with various stakeholders within each case including K-12 physical educators, administrators, classroom teachers, district leadership, PETE faculty, and state-level representatives, etc. (see Table 1). Individual interviews were used at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels, and were semi-structured, allowing for the ability to probe stakeholders' responses (Ennis & Chen, 2012). Focus group interviews involve the exploration of perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of a group of people on a particular topic (Merriam, 2015). These types of interviews included collaboration and discussion, bringing richness to the data set that may not be achievable through individual interviews alone (Hennink, 2014). A focus group interview was used at the macro-level, as it allowed for information to be collected from multiple people simultaneously and increased the number of perspectives within the sample. Focus groups followed the recommendations from Ennis and Chen (2012) and included three stakeholders in a single focus group.

Participants were asked to share their stories about policy work, including their thoughts, feelings, and ideas about the processes to gain a deeper understanding that reflected the complexity of policy in their context. The interview guide (see Appendix D) consisted of questions to prompt stakeholders to share their stories and differed slightly based on the

stakeholder and case. For instance, a stakeholder at the micro-level was asked to share about the challenges or barriers faced during local-level advocacy efforts and how they were or were not overcome, whereas a stakeholder or group at the macro-level was asked to elaborate on their experience related to involvement in state-level advocacy efforts and if their story had influenced the discourse or outcomes on a broader scale. When more information was needed, follow-up emails were sent requesting additional information or responses. Considering that participants were distributed widely geographically across a single state, interviews were mostly conducted virtually using video conferencing software (i.e., Zoom; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), while two micro-level interviews were conducted in person. Interviews ($N = 15$) lasted between 15-75 minutes. Table 2 contains an overview of the interview durations for each case.

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim using the transcription capability in Zoom conferencing software. Appropriate steps were undertaken to guarantee confidentiality and maintain anonymity by using pseudonyms for participants and associated schools, organizations, and institutions. Yet, due to the nature of case study design and the public nature of policy work, participants were made aware that the identities of those involved may be obvious to knowledgeable readers (Richmond, 2002). Participants were sent information letters and consent forms electronically prior to the first interview.

Table 2*Interview Duration*

Case-Level	Participant (Pseudonym)	Total Interview Duration
Micro	Alex	52 min
	Samantha	17 min
	Susan	35 min
Meso	Nancy	53 min
	Paula	37 min
	Janelle	29 min
	Tyler	23 min
	Julia	27 min
Macro	James*	75 min
	Joyce*	105 min
	Paige*	125 min
	Kelsey	22 min
	Jordan	35 min
	Leah	28 min
	Senator Miller	25 min

Note. * indicates participants who participated in the focus group interview.

Artifacts

In addition to interviews, artifacts ($N = 32$) were collected (e.g., emails, texts, photos, records, social media posts, etc.). Collecting artifacts such as policy documents can be useful in helping to gain a deeper understanding of policy work (e.g., Crow & Lawlor, 2016; Miller & Morpew, 2017). To illustrate, Crow and Lawlor (2016) gathered interview data as well as various policy documents while examining environmental policy across the United States. Further, Miller and Morpew (2017) studied funding sources for higher education performance

and included sources such as governmental documents, news documents, presentation slides, and flyers. Considering the extensive amount of information needed to provide an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the story related to the research aims, further communication via email with participants occurred throughout the data collection process. All sources of data were stored on a password-protected computer. Policy documents were also collected to provide important information to support the narratives shared by stakeholders. Participants were asked to share any policy documents associated with or in support of their policy work. Online searches for public opinions and media coverage (e.g., news articles) were also conducted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the policy processes and advocacy efforts. Policy documents were collected before and after interviews and were used to inform questioning and/or to confirm and elaborate on information shared during and following the interviews. An audit trail tracking data sources collected was kept using Google Sheets including information about data types, names of documents, interview dates, times, length in minutes, etc. (Gibbert & Ruigrok, 2010; see Appendix E). Table 3 describes artifacts used at each level and how the artifact contributed to the analysis process to gain a comprehensive understanding of the story.

Table 3*Artifact Trail*

Artifact	Information Provided	Level
News Article	News article, “A+ Employee” highlighted the physical educator’s efforts and dedication in a question/answer format	Micro
News Article	News article, “Hometown Hero,” aims to recognize and thank people and companies in the community for their time and talents, featured the physical educator to celebrate his work	Micro
News Article	News article showcasing how the physical educator integrates agriculture into his physical education classes	Micro
News Article	News article featuring students thanking local businesses for their help with the garden renovation project	Micro
Template	“March Madness of Compliments” is an example of how social-emotional learning and mental health connect with physical education in a school-wide application	Micro
Flyer	Family Fitness Night flyer provides context as to how families are engaged in physical education and physical activity settings within the school and school community	Micro
Report	Report with students’ heart data compared to academic test scores to serve as evidence that higher heart is correlated with higher test scores in the school	Micro
Proposal	Detailed outline of a proposal for providing more flexibility for graduation requirements, removing requirements for wellness (e.g., physical education)	Meso

Table 3 (continued)

Artifact	Information Provided	Level
Letter	Letter authored by district physical education teachers to the Superintendent requesting leadership to hire a full-time physical education curriculum facilitator while connecting their 'ask' to the district's mission, literacy, mental health, and other areas supported by evidence	Meso
Letter	Letter provided context as to why the curriculum facilitator and other teachers do not support the proposal to remove graduation requirements for Wellness Education, Fine & Applied Arts, & Foreign Language Credits	Meso
News Article (x2)	Two news articles detailed the district's plans to remove Wellness credits from graduation requirements	Meso
Letter	Letter written on behalf of the state organization urging district leadership to reconsider the proposal to remove the graduation requirement for Wellness Education and maintain the requirement.	Meso
Script	Detailed script written by the curriculum facilitator to use at the district board meeting to oppose the graduation flexibility requirement	Meso
Timeline	Timeline providing details and dates leading up to vote/approval of the graduation flexibility proposal	Meso
Photo	A photo sent via text message by the curriculum facilitator speaking at the district board meeting in support of health and physical education	Meso
Video	A three-minute YouTube clip from the recorded district board meeting of the curriculum facilitator speaking to oppose the graduation flexibility proposal	Meso

Table 3 (continued)

Artifact	Information Provided	Level
Google Folder	Physical education pilot Wrap-Up Book with several documents outlining details of each phase of the physical education pilot project (i.e., Introduction to the Pilot, Strategies, Coalition Decisions, Evaluation, and Coalition Materials)	Macro
PowerPoint Presentation	A presentation about the changes and variations of access to physical education across the state, including quotes from teachers and administrators	Macro
PowerPoint Presentation	Presentation offering anecdotal evidence related to the quality and quantity of physical education in the state and requesting no cuts	Macro
Photos	Photos of coalition and children testifying at State Capital	Macro
Letter	Letter from the state organization asking the Joint Budget Committee to continue to support the physical education pilot in the budget forecast	Macro
Letter	Letter to the Joint Budget Committee sent via email requesting support to fund the physical education pilot as part of the School Finance bill in 2019	Macro
Letter	After seeing that the physical education pilot was to be reduced in the budget, a letter was sent to the State Board of Education requesting that the bill continue to be funded as outlined in legislation	Macro
PowerPoint Presentation	Presentation to the Senate to educate legislators about the benefits and current landscape of physical education in the state as supported by evidence	Macro

Table 3 (continued)

Artifact	Information Provided	Level
Phone Script	Phone script for appropriations urging legislators to vote YES on the bill	Macro
Letter	Letter asking for support for physical education to be a priority in the school finance formula in the School Finance bill Public Comments	Macro
Survey	Brief survey to teachers to collect information about current policies and students' access to physical education in their schools and school districts	Macro
PowerPoint Presentation	Presentation stating the vision and mission of the state organization	Macro
Social Media Posts/Photos	Provided context about state-level advocacy day efforts	Macro
Timeline	Timeline of major milestones through the process of the physical education pilot program provided by two key stakeholders	Macro
Text messages	Raw dialogue showcasing how stakeholders navigated unknowns, long periods of waiting, and the general complexities of the process	Macro

Data Analysis

It was important to remain reflexive and flexible throughout the analysis process, as the researcher often needed to start with one method and incorporate the other as needed. The use of narrative analysis helped to gain a rich understanding of the contextual factors of stakeholders' experiences, and thematic analysis aided in uncovering overarching themes across narratives and other data sources. A wide variety of data sources were used, which allowed for a comparison of themes and interpretations during analysis against data already collected. This was a critical aspect of determining if more data were needed. Constant comparative analysis was also

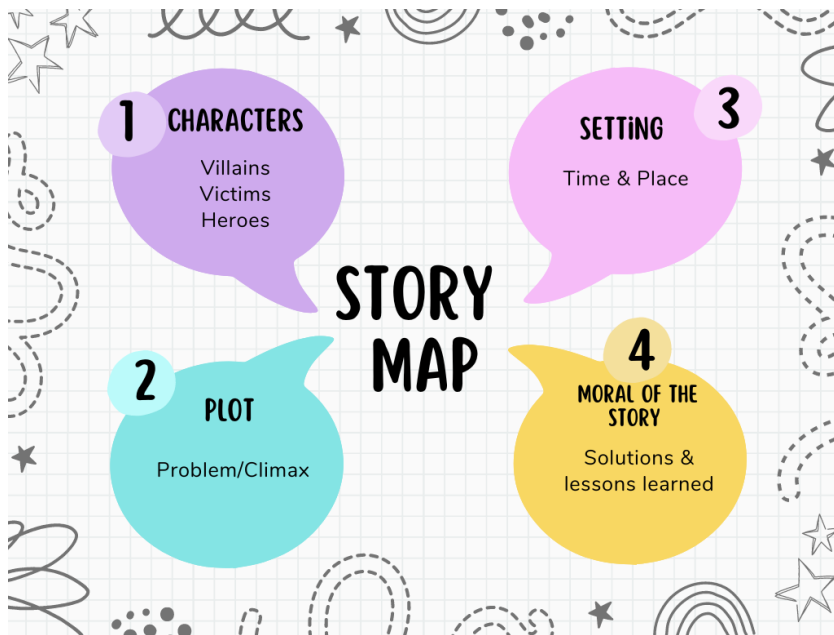
employed by reviewing the data set in comparison with the literature review, NPF, and research aim. This process continued until it was noticeable that patterns and/or themes were beginning to repeat themselves and enough information had been collected to provide a credible and significant contribution toward the research aims (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Saumure & Given, 2008).

Thematic analysis is a common approach for analyzing qualitative data, yet the use of narrative analysis was also necessary to support the interpretation of stories within each case through the use of narrative inquiry (Sunday, 2016). During narrative analysis, the transcripts were broken up by the story and compared and contrasted across participants to develop core narratives (Riessman, 2008). Thematic analysis was employed to further break these blocks down into quotes, then mapped onto codes and compared to overarching patterns. It is important to note that narrative analysis was useful in analyzing the construction of the human story and who the stakeholder was as an individual, yet thematic analysis aided in interpreting and identifying underlying meaning within the phenomena of each case. Thus, while narrative analysis was an appropriate first step, thematic analysis was also necessary for further analyzing the data and took place concurrently, noted as a lesson learned from previous work that used a similar combined approach (Sunday, 2016; Sunday et al., 2020).

Transcribed interviews were analyzed inductively using a narrative analysis approach (Riessman, 2008). Inductive analysis served as an appropriate strategy as the majority of past literature grounded in NPF has used at least a combination of both inductive and deductive analyses (e.g., Woulfe, 2019). Yet an inductive approach has been used most commonly (e.g., Egitim, 2022). In particular, the use of inductive analysis for narrative inquiry is valuable because it allows for open exploration, flexibility, and a contextual understanding for a rich,

detailed description of authentic perspectives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative analysis focuses on turning conversational stories into social research, as narrated by the participants (Riessman, 2008). Aiming to explore stakeholders' experiences and engagement in policy work through storytelling, narrative analysis was an appropriate approach for this study.

Once data were collected from all interviews and other artifacts, the researcher began by arranging participants by case and mapping out participants' individual stories. During this phase, the process of story mapping was useful to help organize the order and sequence of stories. As characterized by Richmond (2002), story mapping is a process of eliciting metacognitive responses in both the storyteller and listener and focuses on the 'core narrative'. During the story mapping process, the four elements described in the NPF (i.e., characters, setting, plot, and moral of the story; Jones et al., 2014) were incorporated. The story mapping process also provides a way to apply Riessman's (2010) step of ordering and sequencing stories during analysis (Sunday, 2016). Additionally, initial overarching themes identified within the story mapping process were noted. This was done for each interview within the case. Story maps were used to start developing and writing the stories, drawing on creative writing techniques while maintaining factual information from transcripts for accuracy in narrating the story. Figure 1 illustrates the story mapping process.

Figure 1*Story Mapping Process*

To understand and interpret the stories, the researcher drew on Riessman's (2010) steps of narrative analysis. The first step was organizing raw transcripts into a coherent order while paying attention to the sequence of elements within stories. The next step was to work to develop a plot from the disordered storied experiences as the participant remembered and shared them while transferring them into a story with a beginning, middle, and ending, though only some of the stories needed to be reorganized in developing the plot. Next, the narratives were structured based on the contexts of time and place, noting the temporal order in which events were shared. The last step was to organize the narratives thematically to uncover underlying messages and gain a deeper understanding of the story. Narrative analysis placed a strong emphasis on the stakeholder as the storyteller, and as this perspective was explored, the researcher also engaged in inductive thematic analysis simultaneously throughout the analysis process to develop a rich

understanding of stakeholders' experiences across all data sources (i.e., transcripts, policy documents, and other artifacts), which was an iterative process.

From a case study perspective and considering the last step in Riessman's (2010) recommendation for narrative analysis, the thematic analysis also allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of each case, in addition to shedding light on insights from the narrator about the context of the stories (Riley & Hawe, 2005; Sondag, 2016). Following guidelines from Braun and Clarke (2006), six stages of thematic analysis were used. After data were collected, the researcher became familiar with the data by engaging in several readings and noting initial thoughts. Second, using a table in Google Documents, initial codes were documented related to the research aim and searched to identify themes within the collated codes, which at times overlapped with the story mapping process and narrative analysis, leading to potential patterns. Analysis was an iterative and reflexive process as the researcher needed to go back and forth between transcripts to ensure an acceptable level of understanding of the overall story that was being obtained, as well as notes of dissonance. Once the codebook was developed, the researcher pulled larger chunks of data/parts of the story that aligned with the code, followed by selecting smaller sections and individual quotes that support and illustrate the patterns. The next step was to review the themes to determine if they best represent the coded segments, or the data set entirely. At this point, it was useful to write codes and patterns on Post-it notes, allowing the researcher to move and organize them into themes and subthemes. Ongoing analysis occurred across all data sources as themes were refined to be representative of the data set.

By combining insights from artifacts with case narratives, core narratives were constructed that captured commonalities across cases and conveyed the participants' experiences

in policy work. Using the stories constructed, within-case analysis of individual narratives was employed to understand the context of participants' experiences in policy work. Upon identifying key components within individual stories, cross-case analysis was then used to identify the distinctive and shared components of each story across cases. The identified themes and codes served as a reference point for analyzing artifacts to detect similarities and differences between artifacts and interview transcripts throughout the ongoing analysis process across all data sources. Artifacts such as flyers, news articles, pictures, PowerPoints, and other artifacts were analyzed using narrative analysis, working to interpret the stories these materials told and understand how they contributed to the broader story within a particular context. The following steps describe the analysis of artifacts:

1. Became familiar with the context of each artifact, while considering the purpose and audience of the artifact, consider the questions, 'Who created it, for whom, and why?'
2. Identified the narrative structure within the artifact by looking for elements such as the characters, setting, plot, and moral, while paying attention to the language and tone.
3. Interpreted the underlying messages conveyed through the artifact and how they related to the story at large.
4. Compared each message across different artifacts while identifying recurring themes, patterns, or notes of dissonance.
5. Reflected on positionality, the researcher took into account personal background, beliefs, and biases and how they might be influencing the interpretation while considering and separating the researcher's own policy story.

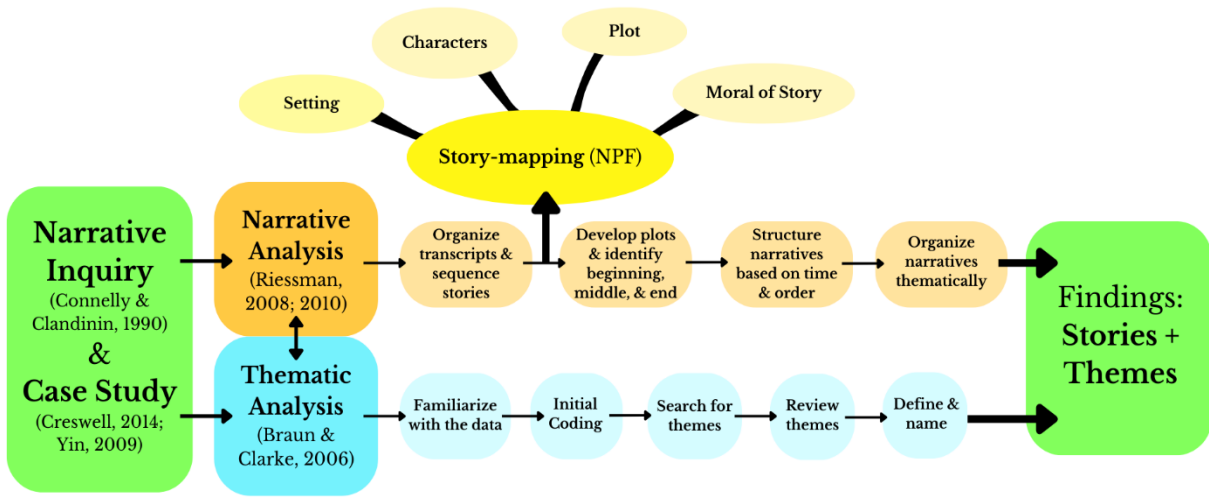
The final phase of thematic analysis was to produce a scholarly report, which encompassed both narrative and thematic analysis processes in the form of stories portraying the

case, followed by a summary of themes. Additionally, triangulation not only increased the credibility of this research but also improved the ability to obtain a more robust interpretation of the data and convey the nuances and processes of participants' policy work through enhanced storytelling.

Lastly, guided by Sunday's (2016) work, it was important to determine the emerging theoretical constructs that formed throughout the analysis process. Neuman (2011) defined theorizing as the development of a system of interconnected ideas that describe how and why events in the world occur. Thus, drawing connections to theories and/or frameworks upon analysis and mapping the findings onto frameworks was an iterative process to conceptualize stakeholders' stories and experiences. Figure 2 illustrates the analysis processes for narrative analysis and thematic analysis, using a merged case study and narrative inquiry methodological approach.

Figure 2

Analysis Process Using a Merged Case Study and Narrative Inquiry Methodological Approach



Trustworthiness

To establish trustworthiness, member checks were completed by participants to approve or disapprove of assertions as evidence (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and participants were invited to elaborate or correct responses. To gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of how artifacts support narratives, triangulation across multiple data sources was used (Patton, 1999).

During data collection, the investigator kept a journal to note thoughts, feelings, and potential biases throughout the project. For example, after each interview, using the 'voice notes' feature on an iPhone, the researcher reflected on the process, what was learned, what was still hoped to learn, and how each perspective contributed to the understanding of the story and its potential implications. The notes in this journal were particularly helpful to refer back to during the analysis process, as the notes often described how ideas and stories across participants and cases overlapped, similarities and differences, and ultimately aided in developing patterns and overarching themes. Negative case analysis was used to determine when notes of dissonance arose, bringing further value to the data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Trustworthiness was established further through the utilization of maximum variation, a sampling strategy that involves selecting participants with diverse characteristics and experiences that capture a wide range of perspectives to enhance the data set (Creswell, 2014). Participants of this study were selected from different backgrounds and experiences, bringing richness and depth to the data collected.

To increase trustworthiness and encourage reflexivity, data were sent to peer debriefers in which themes and relationships were challenged and discussed (Creswell, 2014). Specifically, data were sent first to a researcher familiar with the topic of policy, but outside of the scope of

physical education. During this process, the peer debriefer asked questions not only about the organization of patterns and themes but also about similarities and differences across cases. Engaging in this discussion was extremely useful in helping not only define the themes but also in developing the hierarchical structure of themes. For instance, the peer debriefer pointed to parallels between quotes from two different participants, which prompted the researcher to interpret further. During this process, referring back to the visual representation of the Post-it map, the researcher reorganized various codes into new and existing themes with newly developed insights. Peer debriefers were selected based on their familiarity of the topic of policy and qualitative research methods. Then, a second researcher, who is familiar with physical education policy work as well as qualitative research methods, reviewed the methodology and findings of the study.

Positionality and Reflexivity

In line with qualitative research norms, I offer information pertinent to understanding my role as the researcher, connections, and interests in this work. I recognize that to establish a sense of credibility and trustworthiness, it is critical to gain an understanding of my background, experiences, and perspectives driving the motivations for this study.

At the start of this dissertation in the fall of 2023, I served as a graduate teaching assistant in a doctoral PETE program where I completed coursework, conducted research, and taught classes for physical education majors at the university. Before entering the doctoral program, I taught for 3 years as an instructor in PETE at another university. Additionally, before that, I taught 6 years of elementary and middle school physical education, adapted physical education, health education, and environmental education after completing my master's degree in 2012 at the University of Wisconsin LaCrosse.

Throughout my teaching career, I have been involved in various professional engagements, many of which led to my interest and participation in policy-related work. Though I have led councils and taskforces through position statement and guidance document revisions, served on advocacy committees, and participated in several local, state, and national-level policy advocacy initiatives, I consider myself a beginner involved with policy work, particularly, policy research.

Without formal training, I have become socialized into the profession and do consider myself a policy actor. Upon learning more about the lack of policy work in the physical education field yielding its continued marginalized status, I wonder how I can contribute to this work to better prepare and support other physical education policy actors. In addition to past literature, several conversations with leaders, scholars, and other professional connections at conferences (e.g., National Association for Kinesiology in Higher Education Conference, SHAPE Convention, etc.) have continued to revolve around the need for not only more policy advocacy engagement but the need for more scholars doing this work. Before this research and acknowledging the importance of looking beyond legislative work, I conducted a pilot study aiming to explore PETE faculty members as policy actors in the United States. This preliminary work not only provided valuable information as a stepping stone for this dissertation, but my passion for policy work grew, as did my curiosity about the use of narratives for policy work and for teaching advocacy skills.

Finally, I believe my background and positionality have the potential to influence the analyses and presentation of findings. As a white, cis-gender female who holds several leadership roles at local, state, and national levels through service engagements in the field, I bring implicit privilege that I work to acknowledge but sometimes escape my awareness.

Additionally, I am a first-generation college student; at times, I can feel misplaced in a doctorate program, working to battle against the strains of my own personal challenges from childhood into adulthood. These identities have a potential influence on data collection, analysis, and interpretations of the data. Therefore, throughout this work, I made every effort to keep these influences at the forefront of my mind, as I acknowledge that I am the primary instrument within the qualitative research process (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2011). My research journal aided in my ability to continuously check in with myself about my positionality as I made decisions and put forth every effort to strive for neutrality in letting the data speak for itself.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The findings in this chapter are presented in the following order: (a) micro-level case, (b) meso-level case, and (c) macro-level case. Before sharing the micro-level case story, information pertaining to the policy landscape of the state in which all three cases were studied is provided for context. Then, for each level, a story map outlining the characters, setting, plot, and moral of the story is provided (Richmond, 2002). Next, each character (i.e., participant) is introduced, followed by the story of the case as narrated by the researcher. After the story, themes are presented with narrative blocks and quotations from interviews, as well as artifacts. Data are referenced after the quotation or details about the artifact (e.g., Alex, interview). Refer to Table 1 for the full list of participants, Table 2 for details about the duration of interviews, and Table 3 for the full list of artifacts in the study. Lastly, a summary of the themes in each case is presented.

State Policy Context

To provide context, the three cases selected for this study originate from a state that does not mandate physical education. Characterizing the policy landscape, the state is governed by local control, allowing for schools and school districts to have autonomy in shaping their educational agendas based on local needs and priorities. The state, considered one of the healthiest with regard to adults, has some of the fastest rising rates of child obesity with 14.7% of youth between 10-17 years old having obesity (State of Childhood Obesity, n.d.). The decentralized approach results in varied implementations of not just physical education

programs, but opportunities and access to physical activity opportunities as well. Efforts to address the challenging policy landscape to promote physical education and physical activity have been addressed by organizations such as the state's Department of Education, a health foundation, and state level healthy schools. The state does provide statutes that require school districts to adopt state education standards, require districts to report physical education offerings publicly, and require local school boards to adopt policies related to physical activity at the elementary level. Thus, the state Department of education policies and guidelines can aid in supporting school-based physical activity opportunities for students before, during, and after the school day. The physical education and physical activity policy context of the state requires a nuanced understanding of how local preferences, resources, and challenges impact the implementation of and access to quality physical education.

Micro-Level

The micro-level case study was about a dedicated teacher at Crystal Brook Academy (pseudonym) who aimed to reshape the role of a physical educator within his school while navigating subpar policies for physical education. He implemented innovative teaching methods, had a passion for incorporating various subjects into the physical education program, and endorsed the concept of being a "movement specialist" to promote physical activity and wellness inside and outside of school. Aside from the physical education teacher, a classroom teacher, and the dean of students, who also spoke from a parent's perspective, were key supporters of his efforts and held important roles in the story. Table 4 illustrates the story map for the micro-level.

Table 4*Micro-Level Story Map*

Characters	Setting
<p>Heroes: Alex, and supporting administration and classroom teachers/staff</p> <p>Villains: Systemic undervaluation & marginalization of physical education, and competing priorities</p> <p>Victims: students</p>	<p>The school building (classrooms, gym, and gardens) and school community</p>
Plot/Problem	Moral of the Story
<p>Alex faces challenges such as limited time for physical education due to competing priorities, scheduling demands, and overcrowding in the school</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Innovation and persistence are essential in promoting physical education and physical activity opportunities - Community and administrative support can lead to meaningful changes - Integrating physical education with other academic subjects enriches students' overall education, helping to reverse marginalization

Meet the Characters*Alex*

As the school's physical educator for 12 years, Alex has drawn from his background in youth corrections to inform his teaching, integrating experiences from outdoor activities like skiing. With expertise in math, science, and sports, he has advocated for innovative physical education methods, prioritizing holistic learning for students. Alex also has a passion for agriculture and has regularly integrated related concepts into physical education while promoting cross-curricular initiatives school-wide.

Samantha

An administrator and parent within the school, Samantha brought 18 years of experience in education, including roles as a teacher, interventionist, and most recently, dean of students. Speaking from both a parent and administrative perspective, she emphasized the value placed on social-emotional and physical health in the school.

Susan

Both a classroom teacher and a parent at the school, Susan brought a valuable perspective shaped by her diverse educational experiences. She has regularly incorporated kinesthetic learning and movement integration into her classroom. Facing challenges of her former students being apprehensive to attend physical education class and/or engage in physical activity in the classroom in the past, she has advocated for the need for comprehensive educational experiences to support students' well-being.

The Story: Redefining a Physical Educator as a “Movement Specialist”

At Crystal Brook Academy where physical education has been championed as the foundation of student's overall well-being, a dedicated and energetic physical education teacher has demonstrated how he has overcome barriers to provide quality physical education experiences for all children. Despite the school's commitment to health and wellness, overcrowding and scheduling challenges have resulted in limited time allocated for physical education, perhaps stemming from subpar policies at district and state levels. Amidst constraints, the teacher, referred to as “Coach Alex” in the school community, has embraced a philosophy of focusing on what he can do rather than what he cannot do. With creativity, passion, and persistence, Alex has navigated the complexities of policy limitations, rearranging schedules and

introducing innovative initiatives beyond physical education to ensure that every student has the opportunity to develop into a competent and confident lifelong mover.

This story took place in a school, yet advocacy efforts have reached beyond the gymnasium and classrooms into the school garden and broader context of the local school community. Alex, the story's hero, with allies like Samantha, the supportive dean of students, and Susan, a fellow teacher who has embraced and implemented kinesthetic learning, battled against the implied villains of this narrative such as contextual barriers such as competing subject areas, scheduling conflicts, overcrowding, and larger barriers related to lack of district and/or state policies influencing physical education. The victims of this tale, of course, were the students themselves, receiving only minimal physical education instruction. The plot thickened as Alex confronted the challenges by going beyond the general responsibilities of a physical educator, integrating innovative physical education, constrained by not just overcrowded schedules and minimal time allocations for physical education, but only one gym. Alex has found a way to navigate sub-par policies and circumstances with creativity, passion, and persistence.

Alex started his educational career as a substitute teacher with a background in teaching at a youth corrections facility, but he recognized early on the importance of quality physical education. Over time he has "redefined" what it meant to be a physical educator. Alex's assertion that physical education was not just about teaching sports, it was about leveraging these experiences as vehicles for broader educational outcomes and student engagement. He has been proud of his unconventional approach to not just incorporating non-traditional activities into class, such as archery, and fly-fishing, but also considering integration of subjects like math, reading, and science into physical education and physical activity opportunities throughout the

school day as a way to advocate. Other staff also have spoken highly of Alex, such as Susan, a classroom teacher who regularly implemented brain boosters into her class, as well as kinesthetic learning, some of which she has learned from Alex at school-wide professional development meetings.

Alex's school has served students from kindergarten to fifth grade and has had a maximum capacity of 415 students. The current enrollment at the school was 727 students. Before the schedule change, Alex would see students in physical education for 3 days in a row and then, depending on the grade level may go 6 weeks before seeing them again. Alex was able to work with colleagues and administration to adjust the schedule to increase the number of days in a row in which he saw students in an effort to more effectively teach a unit but, due to the need to rotate with several other subject areas in addition to serving more than 300 students than there is space for, students still went approximately 5 weeks until they rotated back to physical education class again. Scheduling challenges did not just affect physical education but other subjects as well. School administration (e.g., Samantha) indicated that not only was physical education and movement more broadly valued as part of the school's philosophy, but Alex's efforts went beyond the school walls. Samantha, the dean of students at the school, was a supporter of his initiatives and programs as he provided opportunities for staff to be active, engaged the families and local community in his efforts, and provided evidence connecting academic achievement and movement. For instance, Alex collected data to show when students got their heart rates up more often, test scores also rose, and presented these data to decision-makers in his building. Facing the challenge of limited class time with students, Alex has not relented. Instead, he has navigated these obstacles with creativity, an open mind, and perseverance.

In his pursuit to redefine physical education, Alex has endeavored to take on the role of “movement specialist,” integrating core academic subjects and life skills into his curriculum. With administrative support and a focus on family and community engagement, he aimed to show students that physical activity encompassed a wide range of activities beyond traditional sports, fostering a foundation of lifelong learning and healthful behaviors. Not only has Alex integrated interdisciplinary curricula into physical education, but he also has provided opportunities for students to engage in other content areas through movement such as separate classes for reading and social-emotional learning. To take things a step further, Alex, through grant writing, has purchased heart rate monitors and collects data during these classes and initiatives to show stakeholders within the school that active kids learn better. His dedication to securing grants did not just supply heart rate monitors for students but has also provided opportunities for students to engage in active gaming, and the ability to purchase equipment for other non-traditional and lifelong activities (e.g., fly-fishing, archery, golf).

Beyond cross-curricular efforts, the integration of non-traditional physical education and physical activity opportunities, and strategies to use heart rate data as evidence to support his programming, Alex was nationally recognized for integrating agriculture into physical education. By fostering a community effort with support from local farmers, parent volunteers, fellow teachers, and businesses, integrating agriculture into physical education and beyond has been something Alex has been most proud of, in particular, the renovation of the school garden. Upon being awarded a grant from Fuel Up to Play 60, he acquired Global Positioning Systems (GPS) units for his class, which were used in a fitness unit where students located wave points and connected agriculture to physical education as he taught students how farmers can use similar GPS devices when they were working on their crops. Upon raising \$96,000 in in-kind donations

and help of students, colleagues, and the community, Alex has restored the garden, showing the way strong relationships with families and businesses in the local community can promote active and healthy lifestyles in schools. Collaborative efforts have not stopped there, as the school garden was used by classroom teachers and students helped to take care of it during a garden club, which currently has about 80 students.

If a physical educator could be the “rockstar” of the building in an elementary school, Alex assumed this title, not just among students, but among staff and the entire community. Though at school she wore an administrator hat, Samantha was also a parent of a student in Alex’s class. She described her daughter as an “artsy music kid” who had never really felt successful in physical education until he took her under his wing, connected with her, and believed in her. Susan believed that the rest of the staff in the building supported him because they knew he always worked to do what was best for students first. Having taught in other schools in which many of her students disliked physical education and would forget their shoes on purpose to avoid participating, Susan was enthusiastic that all of her students were excited to go to physical education class, even those who were not “athletic.” Similar to Samantha, Susan was also able to speak from a parent’s perspective. Susan has three kids whom Alex has taught, and while two of them have always loved physical education, her middle child never enjoyed it in schools they attended prior. However, now Susan believed that she was the child who connected with Alex the most, and while she would not describe her as “sporty,” her daughter asked for things like garden gloves and golf clubs, due to Alex’s influence.

Alex’s tireless advocacy for enriched physical education and physical activity experiences emphasized the need for physical education teachers to move beyond their conventional duties and assume the role of “movement specialist” within their buildings. Aiming

to redefine physical education, the moral of the story was the importance of persistence, innovation, and a holistic approach to education as it related to advocacy efforts. With many successful advocacy strategies and the ability to overcome various challenges, Alex's story has served as a call to educators, policymakers, and advocates to prioritize and amplify the importance of physical education in the curriculum, ensuring equitable access and robust support for the benefit of students. Through his holistic approach, he has inspired action to navigate complexities and realities, urging stakeholders to actively engage in shaping a future where physical education thrived as an invaluable component of a student's well-rounded education, as well as the importance of establishing a school culture that values movement.

Micro-Level Themes

Three major themes were identified within the landscape of physical education policy advocacy at the school level: (a) Advocacy champions within and beyond the school walls, (b) Redefining the role of the physical educator, and (c) Navigating policy challenges. The story mapping process provided insights into what characters were necessary to advocate at the micro-level within the school building and beyond. Further, the setting and plot helped to define what Alex centered his advocacy efforts around, especially when navigating current policies and barriers out of his control. Lastly, several strategies were used to advocate for both physical education and physical activity opportunities, important to note about lessons learned.

Advocacy Champions Within and Beyond the School Walls

In a school that has served an enrollment of nearly double its capacity, advocating for more physical education has been challenging. Alex, the physical educator, has been an enthusiastic advocacy champion, yet he cannot make a significant impact alone. In his interview, he noted the power that other key players, including classroom teachers, administrators, students,

families, and the community, have had in supporting efforts to provide a quality, innovative physical education program as well as a variety of movement opportunities for students to learn.

Engaging families and the community is pivotal. Alex's initiative to raise "\$96,000 in kind donations to put the garden together" (Alex, interview; artifact, news article) exemplified the power of community support to not only enhance his physical education program but to promote health and wellness to the community more broadly. Alluding to other initiatives, such as family fitness nights (artifact, flyer), Susan described the importance of families and the community within Alex's advocacy efforts in her interview, "the community events were a huge thing that we haven't done in a long time and parents are like begging, hey, how can I be involved in my kid's education so that P.E. aspect was great" (Susan, interview).

In response to asking if she believed the administration supported Alex's physical education program and physical activity initiatives, she elaborated on all the different field trips and initiatives and shared that it was not easy to get a field trip funded in the school. Further, she indicated, "So I feel like for them to say yes shows their support" (Susan, interview).

Susan and Samantha were not only able to speak from a classroom teacher and administrator perspective but also from a parent's perspective. In her interview, Susan began talking about the impact of Alex's physical education program on her own children, particularly after a bowling unit, and how it has transferred outside of school. Susan shared:

And then my child came home, and he's like, we need to go bowling. I need a bowling ball. And then, that's cool because now he wants to go bowling with his grandma. So those effects are way bigger than just moving. So now he asked his grandma, can we go bowling? And she's excited to take her grandson bowling.

She also shared that her son has always been active, but that has not always been the case for her daughter. Noting the difference Alex's physical education program has made in her daughter's life, Susan noted:

As a mom, my daughter was not very physically ..., I mean, she was a she's competitive swimmer, but overall didn't really feel successful in P.E. It wasn't really her thing. She's an artsy music kid and he just kind of took her under his wing and she was in a running club with him and, I mean, did all these things just cause it's him because she thought he was great and cool and she really connected with him. And he believed in her.

In agreement that families and communities supported Alex's efforts, Samantha pointed out, "he's bringing awareness to families so that it's not just in our building walls, it's outside of our school" (Samantha, interview). Thus, Alex's innovative physical education program and other initiatives were possible not only due to support from advocacy champions in the school building but also through the support from the families and community he impacted as a result of the collaborative efforts.

Redefining the Role of the Physical Educator

At the forefront of Alex's advocacy efforts was the innovative notion of serving as a "movement specialist" who expanded beyond traditional roles to promote holistic education and a culture where movement was valued for learning. He demonstrated his dedication as he integrated other subjects into his classes, showing the versatility and depth of the physical education curriculum. To illustrate, Alex shared:

My whole concept is taking that persona of physical education and being a movement specialist. So when you're a movement specialist now, I can show how I meet the needs of the core academic day. How do I give merit to that? I am an extension of the learning,

not just a physical educator, so I'm taking exactly what they're learning for economics, and now I'm doing it actively, you know, being an extension of the data has a difference. He was recognized for his efforts and advocated further for the term, "movement specialist" to educate others as he shared in a news article titled, "Hometown Hero." He explained that physical education was much more than allowing kids to burn off energy and described the way he used his position to help kids learn confidence, patience, discipline, and much more through physical education. He was quoted in the news piece, "If you could take the word 'P.E. out and you could become a 'movement specialist', people would actually see how much a physical education teacher teaches math, reading, and science and how this class impacts their normal day" (Artifact, news article; Alex, interview).

In addition to integrating interdisciplinary into his gymnasium, he noted that the strong relationships he had built with classroom teachers and administration aided in promoting a school culture that values movement. These key players in the building not only supported his program and other initiatives to get kids moving, but other teachers valued it enough to integrate it into their spaces. Beyond physical activity "breaks," teachers used movement to allow for kinesthetic learning. In her interview, Susan described a time when she walked by Alex's class. She stated, "he was talking about, I don't know, something about blood paths, how they work, and the game pertained to that stuff. So just him just including information within his P.E. So they're learning as well." Explaining the impact of various types of initiatives Alex implemented school-wide, she shared:

The rocket stuff, the gardening, the bowling, the bow and arrows, like not everything is just running or exercising some things. Teaching these kids that I can be active without

playing sports or just running like there's way more to physical activity than what I am told from my parents or what I've seen so or society tells me or whatever.

The school and school district also value physical education and movement and Samantha shared in her interview, "I think the value of physical education and movement and getting our kids movement has always been a big part of our philosophy here at [Crystal Brook Academy] and as a district, we're big on social, emotional and physical health." Acknowledging capacity and scheduling barriers, she continued, "I would love them to have P.E. every day, but unfortunately, that's not feasible" (Samantha, interview). Thus, redefining the role of the physical educator was inclusive of garnering the support from classroom teachers and administration to build a school culture that valued movement, including innovative programming for physical education.

Breaking from traditional physical education activities, Alex incorporated archery, lacrosse, and gardening into his classes to not only enrich the curriculum but also to educate the community about what *today's* physical education looked like. This concept was presented in the "Hometown Hero" news article, "you won't find students in [Alex]'s P.E. classes simply jumping rope or just kicking a ball around." When interviewing Alex, one of the efforts he was most proud of and passionate about was the integration of agriculture into physical education. Speaking to laying the "foundation" for kids later in life, he was quoted in another news article sharing, "I tell the kids ... 'If you're able to get the knowledge now, [nutrition] is one of those areas of study, no matter how old you get, it stays the same.'" Incorporating such activities has made students excited to go to physical education classes.

Susan has taught in other schools and reflected on the fact that many students disliked physical education in the past, so much so that they would forget their shoes on purpose. She

explained how Alex's program was different and more inclusive, "I have all types of students in here, so athletic ability to a huge range. I have special needs kids in here. They all are excited to go to P.E. So like that's a testimony to what [Alex] does" (Susan, interview). Sharing why the use of non-traditional activities better positioned students to engage in lifelong physical activity, he said, "we did it in P.E. We did the skill set but then how do I apply it to life?" Alex noted, "I can use the same skill set, or non-traditional in the same place, just like archery, and that showcases things outside of the house." Keeping the larger goal of helping children to develop the knowledge and skills to be active for their lifetime, Alex's strategies to provide innovative physical education and physical activity opportunities have made an impact. Stemming from the concept of "movement specialist," Alex aimed to redefine the role of the physical educator, though this work is not without challenges.

Navigating Policy Challenges

Alex's active participation in policy discussions, such as advocating for schedule changes, emphasized the need for proactive advocacy to elevate physical education and physical activity in schools, especially when facing barriers like scheduling. With almost 300 students over the school's capacity, competing time for other subject areas, and one gym, Alex's creative approaches showed the importance of not only persistence but flexibility and the need to keep an open mind to meet the needs of the whole child. In addition to "taking a seat at the table" in terms of manipulating the schedule, Alex also spoke to a shift in mindset during school-level professional development settings as it related to navigating the current policy landscape in his building. Referring to his approach to attending staff meetings that did not pertain to physical education, Alex explained:

We have a tendency to go to a staff meeting every Tuesday and I learn data and I go to meetings that pertain to nothing I do. But there's a purpose of why I'm going. Can I take what I'm being told and can I spin P.E. to incorporate what I've been taught?

Not only did Alex keep an open mind when it came to professional development, but he recognized the challenges of scheduling within the circumstances of the school and took the initiative to help adjust the students' schedules to benefit all. In his interview, Alex also discussed the impact of data-informed programming and how this strategy has been useful in pushing initiatives forward with the administration.

Alex's advocacy story has several layers from the ways he integrated agriculture and other non-traditional sports and activities into his physical education program to hosting an "active reading" program where students came to his gym, not for physical education, but to practice reading skills while moving. Why? He consistently provided data to support that active children were better learners. Describing how he used evidence to support various initiatives, he said, "our reading and our math scores were plummeting" (Alex, interview). He collected heart rate data and compared it to test scores to show that, when kids were more active, they performed better on tests, not just in research he found somewhere, but for students in his building (artifact, report). Noting the power of data-driven decision-making, from an administrator perspective, "I think there's also enough research base understanding of the connection between academic achievement with movement and physicality and how those two unite, that you can get that support from your admin pretty easily with that research" (Samantha, interview). Aside from using evidence, Alex believed that he has been able to advocate for the mission of physical education largely due to providing innovative programming.

While the school and leadership value physical education, students were receiving nowhere near the national recommendations for days or minutes of physical education. In addressing the challenge of limited physical education time, Alex and his colleagues pursued a strategy focused on restructuring the physical education schedule to increase the frequency of classes, if not the duration. Harnessing data to advocate for the changes, he provided evidence that behavior issues escalated when students had less access to physical education. To advocate, Alex shared, “But then pulling data. Our behaviors will really escalate,” using evidence to argue for a need to “restructure management wise,” he said. By demonstrating how more frequent physical education can enhance both physical and academic outcomes, as he provided heart rate data showing improvements in cardiovascular efficiency and math scores, Alex made a compelling case for adjusting the physical education schedule by reflecting:

I want to see the kids at a greater rate, more often is just so much better. So showing the data showing I can take the heart rate monitors, I can show what the cardiovascular efficiency was with our second-grade kids. To be able to carry on a unit a little bit better and what their math concepts were, so our math scores, etc. increased with what our heart rate is.

He concluded, “that was enough proof that there’s data that drives why we do it” (Alex, interview).

The shift to seeing students for consecutive days, rather than sporadically over weeks, was seen as a valuable adjustment by not just Alex, but Samantha as well, from the standpoint of an administrator. Comparing the schedule change from students receiving physical education 3 days in a row to receiving it 5 days in a row, Samantha echoed this sentiment, “what is better to see a kid for five days in a row and then you don’t see them for 6 weeks? That did seem very

valuable with the programs and the things that [Alex] wanted to do.” Beyond adjusting the schedule, he believed that advocating for the field required not just an open mind but a broad approach to support students physically, socially, emotionally, and academically.

Alex’s efforts aligned with a holistic approach to promoting overall health and well-being within the school culture, mirroring the school’s strategic goals to foster a culture of valuing physical education and physical activity as integral components of education. To ensure teachers had the tools to integrate movement into their classrooms, Alex provided professional development for staff and collaborated often to integrate cross-curricular content. Upon garnering support through collaborations and building relationships, classroom teachers recognized that physical education extended beyond the gym, consistent with content from the local news article explaining how Alex integrated agriculture into his physical education program. For instance, Susan shared, “The agriculture thing is pretty neat because there are some kids that don’t realize that P.E. is more than just sports” (Susan, interview; artifact, news article). She, along with other staff, used the garden to teach other concepts as well like math and science, and Alex communicated regularly with them to extend their learning in physical education. Alex has been supported largely because staff within his building knew he advocated the way he did for the students. Susan noted, “We know he is all involved for the kids. Like, he is 100% gonna do what’s best for them.” With kids at the center of his approach, the use of data-informed programming, active involvement in restructuring the physical education schedule to ensure more consecutive days in a row, and a collaborative, positive mindset are essential strategies that emphasize the perseverance and adaptability needed to navigate policy challenges effectively.

Summary

Through the lens of dedicated educators like Alex, administrators like Samantha, and supportive teachers like Susan, who both also speak from the role of a parent, this narrative shows the important role of advocacy in reforming physical education into a comprehensive component of student well-being. Alex's story of redefining physical education shows how beyond advocating for more time through schedule adjustments, physical educators can work to change the broader school culture around physical education. He advocated for other physical educators to build relationships and go beyond the role of the physical educator, suggesting that overcoming marginalization required proactive advocacy and a shift in mindset. Through strategic advocacy, supported by data, and a focus on changing perceptions around physical education, Alex navigated subpar policies to promote a school culture that values movement, shedding light on the importance of leveraging and building relationships with advocacy champions within and beyond the school walls, redefining the role of the physical educator through innovative approaches, and strategies for navigating policy challenges and restrictive circumstances at the school level.

Meso-Level

The meso-level case study was a story about advocates in Blue Pine School District (pseudonym) working to obtain a full-time health and physical education curriculum facilitator as well as the impact and triumphs thereafter. Serving part-time in this role before the development of the full-time position was a science teacher, who was also the curriculum facilitator for science. Avid physical educators and advocates in the district championed advocacy efforts to develop the position. After approval from the district leadership, the full-time curriculum facilitator position was opened and filled by a local middle school health and physical

educator and leader within the profession. Though she has been able to successfully serve as the “voice” for physical educators within the school district, striving to enhance the quality and implementation of their programs, it has not been without challenges. This narrative outlined the successful strategies that were used to hire the curriculum facilitator and described the complexities of policy processes at the district level. Table 5 illustrates the story map for the meso-level.

Table 5

Meso-Level Story Map

Characters	Setting
<p>Heroes: Nancy, Paula, Janelle, & other physical educators & Community partners</p> <p>Ally: Julia</p> <p>Villains: Budget cuts, policy limitations, administrative resistance, misunderstandings of physical education’s value, colleagues, who implement inappropriate practices (furthering marginalization)</p> <p>Victims: Students & teachers in district</p>	<p>Schools and school communities within district</p>
Plot/Problem	Moral of the Story
<p>The struggle of dedicated physical educators to advocate for a full-time curriculum facilitator, and the implementation of quality physical education against systematic challenges (e.g., budget limitations, proposed changes to district graduation requirements)</p>	<p>The importance of advocacy, perseverance, collective action, & the need for specialized knowledge to impact change</p>

Meet the Characters

Nancy

With 24 years of teaching experience, Nancy has served as the district's health and physical education curriculum facilitator. Prior to this position, Nancy served as a health and physical educator in the district. She also has had experience presenting around the country and has considered this a major way in which she has not only gained the confidence to lead but also as a way to advocate and be a voice for the profession.

Paula

Recently retired after three decades in public education, specifically physical education, Paula has had experience in teaching and administrative roles and has demonstrated relentless dedication to student advancement. She has personified her principle of advocating for students' well-being, no matter the personal cost.

Janelle

With a distinguished 37-year career in education, Janelle has finished her 26th year of teaching secondary physical education in the district. Janelle has been an avid advocate for the profession and a key colleague to rely on to stand up for physical education within the district. Though Janelle has exemplified passion and persistence in advocacy efforts, she has been frustrated by colleagues in the district who contributed to the field's marginalization by implementing lessons far from best practice.

Julia

Though her background has been in chemistry and pharmaceuticals, she transitioned into education and served as the former science education facilitator, as well as the health and physical education curriculum facilitator in the district. Despite challenges, her passion for health

and wellness has fueled her commitment to advocate for teachers. With her knowledge of the policy process at the district level, Julia was especially helpful in guiding physical education advocates in their efforts to open a full-time position for health and physical education.

Tyler

As the Chief Institutional Effectiveness Officer, a newly established role within the school district, Tyler has acquired 15 years of experience as a district-level administrator. Though Tyler has indicated that the district values physical education and wellness more broadly, he and the district leadership team need to balance budget cuts, enrollment considerations, and a changing educational landscape.

The Story: An Advocacy Journey of a Full-Time Curriculum Facilitator

Until 2021, in the Blue Pine School District, a suburban school district in the Rocky Mountain Region of the United States, health and physical education were the only two subject areas without a full-time curriculum facilitator. This changed thanks to a group of dedicated physical education teachers, heroes Paula and Janelle, who advocated tirelessly for the position. Once the position opened, a passionate and highly qualified educator applied and landed the job. Yet, this was not an easy process, nor was it a fast one. At this time, Julia, a science teacher and ally, served as a part-time curriculum facilitator with 50% of her job being dedicated to health and physical education, while also serving as the science curriculum facilitator beyond her regular teaching duties. The other physical educators spoke highly of Julia and praised her efforts to support their subject area and programs, but without a background in health and/or physical education, Julia simply felt as though she could not support such programs in the ways she wanted to and needed to. Not only was someone with expertise needed, but this job needed to be a full-time position. However, advocates would need to navigate systemic barriers, such as

budget cuts, policy limitations, and administrative resistance that often undermines the value of physical education. In addition, advocates faced other challenges of misunderstandings about the significance of physical education and colleagues who, either through devaluing the subject or implementing inappropriate practices, failed to champion the cause. Such obstacles not only make advocacy efforts more difficult to make progress but also serve as the villains in this story. The victims of this story are both the students and teachers who suffer due to the marginalization of physical education, the lack of resources, and the lack of support for the subject area. The plot centers around the struggle of Nancy, Paula, Janelle, and Julia to advocate for and implement quality physical education against these challenges, especially as it relates to the role of a curriculum facilitator as the primary voice for teachers and students in the district.

As the tale has been told, the district's mission and strategic plan acknowledged the importance of wellness, including physical education. Yet, despite this proclaimed value, the reality on the ground, as experienced by the physical educators, was starkly different. Battling against insufficient support, they worked as a collective to advocate for the district to hire a full-time facilitator to champion their cause. Committed physical educators, including leaders like Paula and Janelle, worked to compile supporting evidence, stories, and quotes from students, and parent testimonials, and gain the support from community members to join in their efforts in preparation for speaking at an upcoming district board meeting in March 2020. Understanding the nuances of the policy advocacy process at the district level, Julia helped to guide this work and advocated first-hand that someone with more time and expertise in the area was critical. After gaining momentum, determined to pave the way for changes at the board meeting, not only was the meeting canceled, but school and anything involving interactions with others outside of the household was canceled due to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fast forward to late 2021, school was back in session and the group of educators were prepared to continue their advocacy journey. District physical educators wanted to have a voice at the table for larger conversations; they needed resources and professional development. They talked to their school-building administrators and wrote a letter to district leadership about the need for the full-time curriculum facilitator position for health and physical education.

According to Paula, they prepared for far more push-back than they received and were ready to speak again at the upcoming school board meeting, reminding leadership of the district's goals around wellness, and in particular mental health amidst a global pandemic, and how a full-time curriculum facilitator for health and physical education is ultimately what is best for kids as a shared vision. The position was approved by district leadership.

As soon as the position opened, an avid physical educator, leader, and advocate in the area was hired. With a 24-year teaching background primarily at the middle school level, and the major hero within this story, Nancy's path took a turn toward impacting her profession at the district level. Driven by her desire to advocate for health and physical education, she accepted this role to leverage her extensive expertise to bring about systematic changes by being a voice for health and physical educators within the district. Having Nancy serve in this position for the last couple of years marks a major milestone with her work encompassing a range of initiatives, from developing K-12 physical education curriculum maps to advocating for specialized adapted physical education teachers, enhancing health and wellness education, increasing professional development, and navigating the complex terrain of policy and curriculum development.

Existing barriers remain and new challenges arise. While the advocacy and creation of the full-time curriculum facilitator position has been an important story to tell, it has not stopped there as Nancy, Paula, and Janelle have spoken about a newer threat: A graduation flexibility

proposal to drop wellness credits from district graduation requirements. The proposal was initiated in response to high school students disclosing their desire for more autonomy over their classes and stemmed from challenges within the district as it relates to budget cuts, yet the need to ensure students were set on career pathways. If approved, the proposal would mean that students could go their entire high school career without taking a health or physical education class.

Advocacy strategies with a track record of prior success such as compiling supporting data, and meaningful stories, and advocating collectively with persistence to district decision-makers to recognize health and physical education as an essential part of a student's well-rounded education remain necessary to fight upcoming battles. Despite the struggles with prioritization conflicts, particularly those highlighted by Tyler, the Chief Institutional Effectiveness Officer who emphasized the need to navigate between educational priorities and financial limitations, the moral of the story emerged. The crucial role of advocacy, perseverance, collective action, and specialized knowledge, both in content and in the policy process, is essential for driving change within the system, particularly at the district level. Will the proposal pass, cutting health, physical education, and the arts from high school graduation requirements? Time will tell.

Epilogue

As the story above closes, it is clear that the advocacy efforts continue. It is important to note my position and reflections as the researcher as I work to separate my own story from this narrative as a passionate advocate myself. While I maintain a journal to note my thoughts, emotions, and reactions throughout the study, I also aim to be as transparent as possible to the

reader and anticipate that other researchers, particularly in the policy space, may approach similar scenarios in which we must separate ourselves from our research.

Though my data collection has mostly concluded, I remain aware and invested in the policy advocacy efforts within this district. After seeing the graduation flexibility proposal in not one, but two local news articles, I mentioned it during our state organization board meeting. As a chair of the advocacy committee, I felt it was an obligation to see how the state organization can help support the curriculum facilitator and other stakeholders in the district to oppose the proposal. While the executive director was fine-tuning an advocacy letter to district leadership on behalf of the state organization, I communicated with the curriculum facilitator via text message about details regarding upcoming plans and additional ways to advocate. Nancy mentioned that she would love as many people as possible from the board to support her and speak at the upcoming board meeting. I quickly signed up to speak and began compiling local data, while emailing and texting others to gain as much collective support as possible.

A couple of days later, at our state-level advocacy day at the capitol, I brought the issue forward to legislators regarding the need for policies supporting physical education. In a meeting with a representative from the local district, she informed us that she planned to contact district board members with whom she had a relationship to aid in advocacy efforts to oppose the proposal. The day before the district board meeting, I spent some time thinking; I thought about the awareness of speaking at a district board meeting where some of my interviewees from this project would be present and questioned if I had a conflict of interest. I texted Nancy, apologizing that I was no longer going to be able to attend in an effort to separate myself as the researcher from this story. No one else from the state organization's board was able to attend either, but I hope that the letter and continued support help fight this battle. While I feel sad,

upset, and somewhat guilty for not standing up to advocate for the need to include wellness in every student's education, and the work I love to do in my teaching, research, and service, I know I made the right decision.

Meso-Level Themes

Four major themes were identified within the narrative of advancing quality physical education through policy advocacy: (a) a "students first" focus for advocacy: embracing the whole child, (b) rationalizing the need for resources at the district level, (c) navigating the policy process amidst battles of marginalization, and (d) advocacy 101. The story illustrated the complexities of the policy advocacy process and the journey of a curriculum facilitator's role in being a voice at the district level.

A "Students First" Focus for Advocacy: Embracing the Whole Child

"Right, right, and though we might have different views or perspectives and goals and different things at the end of the day, we're all trying to do as best for kids" (Paula, interview). All interviewees mentioned doing what is "best for students," despite varying viewpoints on what this entails. Whether or not advocates agree, kids remain at the forefront and a driving reason for their efforts. Showing her passion, Nancy shared how she sometimes gets frustrated, "my first reaction is to get mad and fired up because that's not what's best for kids. And so we always go back. I always, always go back to what is best for kids." She continued, "If this is good for kids, it doesn't matter how painful it is for me, I will fight for that." Related to knowing who the key players are, Lisa, a physical educator, advised, "always to figure out who's making the decisions and try to approach it from a kid focus. Yeah, and why this is good for kids" (Paula, interview). Later, in response to the graduation flexibility proposal, Nancy ended her three-minute talk at the board meeting to advocate against removing physical education and

wellness credit requirements from the graduation flexibility proposal, “Don’t do something that is going to change the landscape in [Blue Pine School District] forever. This is not what’s best for students” (artifact, script). Additionally, in a letter opposing the proposal written on behalf of 12 educators and staff in the district, they shared:

Graduating with options doesn’t mean we get rid of so many of the things that students love and need in their lives. Every department, high school, and employee in [Blue Pine School District] deserves an opportunity to view, give feedback, and be presented with a quality plan, and we believe this plan is not what is best for students.

Regardless of perspective, centering advocacy efforts around what is best for kids proves to be a good strategy, as while approaches may differ, the ultimate goal of enhancing the educational and well-being outcomes for students unites all parties in a common purpose.

Regarding values, Tyler stood by the district’s focus on supporting the whole child, “we always have stood by like the whole child concept in our district and not getting too narrowly focused on just reading, writing and math.” Speaking specifically of physical education, he noted, “as far as wellness and P.E. collectively go, it’s a huge priority for our district.” In his interview, as he spoke about the graduation flexibility requirement proposal, he centered the conversation around the fact that the education landscape has changed and is continuing to change. Though physical education is part of a student’s well-rounded education within the Every Student Succeeds Act, Tyler pointed out the recent changes in public education, questioning the prioritization of physical education. He said that changes in the last 5 to 10 years were “putting some pressure on P.E. specifically in the system because it’s not quite as much of a high focus really as a, you know, required for all majors type of thing” (interview). Arguing against the proposal, the curriculum facilitator, on behalf of the coalition of dedicated physical

educators wrote a letter to advocate for physical education in support of the whole child, as it fits within current wellness credit requirements. A glimpse of the letter:

Under the current proposal, a student could go their entire high school career having no wellness education, let alone a health education class. They are integral components of a well-rounded education, contributing significantly to the holistic development of our students as well as their lifelong wellness and contribution to society.

While putting students first in support of the whole child appears to be a priority for all, navigating the advocacy process for not just obtaining a full-time curriculum facilitator, but for the initiatives and challenges that continue to develop is an important story to tell.

Rationalizing the Need for Resources at the District Level

Informing advocacy efforts are district values and varying perspectives of those values. According to district leadership, Tyler shared that hiring a full-time facilitator for health and physical education “is a commitment and it and I have no doubt that the staff in the schools feel better supported and get their questions answered more quickly by someone who’s maybe more knowledgeable and present because it’s a full-time job.” Continuing, he said, “so in all those ways, I’d say those are evidence of that [Blue Pine School District], you know, values wellness and P.E.”

Advocacy efforts to create the full-time health and physical education curriculum facilitator position took time and required strategy. Providing a strong rationale, beyond the fact that health and physical education “were the only content area that did not have a curriculum facilitator” (Janelle, interview), was necessary. Julia, a science teacher, served in the part-time position before the full-time opening was advertised. Juggling teaching and serving as a curriculum facilitator for her subject area, supporting health and physical education “was just this

minimal percentage and was still teaching in a school and trying to do this job, which you cannot do” (Janelle, interview; artifact, letter). Appreciative of Julia’s work while acknowledging the overload as a reason to advocate, Paula said:

She did her best. She had a full-time job. She should have been the science coordinator, but they made her share. She had science, health, and physical education, and that was one person’s job. And that was kind of our argument how do you expect anyone to do that many jobs and do them well?

Striving to make a change, Paula elaborated, “so our next best thing is to get someone in there daily who is involved in that, can be that advocate at the district level because we don’t want to get things done to us anymore” (Paula, interview). Gathering support from the coalition of physical educators in the district, a letter was written to district leadership to advocate for a full-time health education and full-time physical education curriculum facilitator position.

Justifying the need within the letter, they wrote:

It is unfair to ask her to spend over half of her time working in fields that aren’t her areas of expertise. If we truly value the skills of a curriculum facilitator that works diligently to support our students, we would not devalue their hard work and spread them so thin that they aren’t able to support staff and students.

Besides capacity and specialized knowledge, further rationalization was characterized by the time and energy needed to write grants and provide professional development.

“The unfortunate piece is that many of the people that make the decisions aren’t in the classroom daily thing. The struggles that you have, so it’s really helpful to have a district coordinator” (Nancy, interview). By having Nancy in the position recently having served as a middle school physical educator and ready to make a larger difference, the district physical

educators could also benefit from her knowledge and expertise in providing professional development, which was a major necessity within the district. Nancy shared, “I mean number one was a lack of quality professional development. That’s probably the biggest thing.” In addition, to provide quality programs, seeking additional funding was important, but is something for which teachers lack the capacity. Acknowledging this idea from her experience in the position, Julia noted, “For example, if teachers don’t have the time or the energy or the capacity to write grants, someone in this type of position can go out and look for lots of grants, apply for them, and get that funding.” Thus, collectively, stakeholders were able to justify the need for resources in the district, successfully advocating for the creation of the full-time curriculum facilitator position. Yet, these efforts require knowledge of the policy process and navigating efforts amidst continued battles against strains of marginalization.

Navigating the Policy Process Amidst Battles of Marginalization

Though the group faced challenges, garnering support from fellow physical educators in the district who were committed to creating change was key as they navigated the policy process. Battling systemic and societal marginalization, the coalition stood behind its rationale to create and hire a full-time health and physical education curriculum facilitator with specialized knowledge to be the voice at the district level. With the help of the former part-time curriculum facilitator, Julia, and Nancy as she stepped into the position, knowledge of the policy process more broadly was a critical aspect of initial and ongoing efforts.

To set the stage for navigating the policy process, battles against marginalization were threaded through the advocates’ stories, shedding light on the challenges physical education faces as a field. Misunderstandings of its potential and significance, budget constraints, and administrative resistance were hurdles those physical educators faced in advocating for the full-

time curriculum facilitator position, as well as ongoing struggles thereafter. Referring to the district's values, Tyler shared that the hiring of Nancy demonstrated the district's commitment to wellness and physical education. Yet, the teachers shared that they feel devalued. For instance, with many years of teaching within the district under her belt, Janelle asserted, "everybody knows, we're not valued." Sharing further related to the 'fights' they battle:

Like when it's a school-wide collaboration day and we have to go to like this literacy stuff and we're not allowed to meet with our own content area. Just like, why is that a fight? You know? And then just trying to get basic equipment and resources so that every school, no matter where they are in the district, has the same opportunities. You know, based on their needs, you know, and that's still a fight for her. (Janelle, interview)

Speaking of feelings of devaluation, conversations around the new graduation flexibility proposal arose within several interviews. The proposal, if approved, would eliminate physical education, among other subject areas, as a graduation requirement in the district. As Tyler mentioned, the needs and priorities within education continue to evolve, and issues related to budget cuts and enrollment are significant not just within this district, but the education landscape more broadly. To illustrate, Tyler explained, "people care about the schools actually, like the specific schools, the teachers with caseloads of kids in front of them at the schools and that their neighborhood school doesn't shut its doors." Furthering his argument, "where do you think the community and the board and all that's going to line up on supporting expanding, hiring more people at the central office when they're not able to provide transportation to kids to get to and from school? You know, it's a harsh reality." Nancy understands that "money is always an issue" (Nancy, interview). However, she and her team will continue to advocate.

Explaining the rationale behind the graduation flexibility proposal, Tyler also discussed how this move for the district would not only be beneficial financially but would meet the student's needs and desires. After hearing from high school students, he shared their response, "and so P.E. can become like another thing I like have to do while I'm trying to get to these courses that are leading to my future." Continuing, he said, "having too many requirements lined up creates is actually negatively impacting our students' mental health and well-being isn't that interesting. So, P.E. falls into that category." Furthering his argument, "kids certainly get a lot of these physical education experiences through club sports" (Tyler, interview) and they have already received physical education in elementary school and middle school, thus student voice and choice, in conjunction with the evolving landscape, serve as a rationalization for the proposal.

In addition, perhaps misinterpreting physical education for physical activity, Tyler pointed out that students share that they feel more stressed when they need to take too many credits that they are not interested in by stating:

And physical activity is a protective factor against issues of mental health and wellness that interrupt them. And so there's an argument for P.E. there. But there's a counterargument that I've heard, which is in high school in particular, if you require too many P.E. credits, you're actually making it harder for students to enroll in courses that they might be more engaged in and interested in because it's kind of part of a career pathway, if you will, path to become a big deal on secondary education.

While physical education is not within the scope of Julia's expertise, she was able to speak about common misconceptions between physical activity and physical education:

I think the other thing is a big misconception is that physical education is just running around and playing games, but there's so much education that is happening and taking place so that our kiddos can be lifelong learners and being active and setting themselves up for these active lifestyles, not just when they're in there, you know, physical education class, but for life is what we're really aiming for, so advocating that it is so much more and it's so important. (Julia, interview)

Decisions and initiatives like the graduation flexibility proposal further feelings of devaluation and discouragement. In her interview, Janelle discussed only the general marginalization of the subject, but also issues of colleagues in the field not engaging in best practices, let alone engaging in advocacy being a major issue moving forward. She explains:

We didn't matter, you know, and that's what gets cut first. And even now this big push for all this mental wellness and social and emotional learning. And it's like people, that's what we've done for hundreds of years like, that's what we do. And to just not even have the understanding that that's what we do and the value of what we do you know? But then I also see the people in my position or my colleagues that do nothing. (Janelle, interview)

Battling marginalization sheds light on the importance of navigating the policy process adeptly, necessary for advocating for changes in physical education.

Knowing who to talk to, how decisions are made, steps to follow, and a general understanding of the policy process is critical when advocating for change. "Yeah, knowledge is power. So, the more that we know, the more that we're informed about things, the better decisions and choices we can make, absolutely" (Julia, interview). After serving in the position for a couple of years, Nancy shared her experience, "change is very, very hard to do when you

get to this level because there are so many hoops to jump through and people to run things through.” Expanding on this point, she noted, “who do I go to get this passed or do I get this in front of the board, or what are the steps? Because there’s no magic way and I think that at the state and national level that the paperwork trail, it just gets thicker.” Having some experience, Nancy explains the steps at the district level. “So, the first step will be an e-mail to the powers that be. If I don’t get any results on that, then the next logical step is a meeting with leadership. We hope it doesn’t get to the Board of Education level” (Nancy, interview).

Also speaking from experience in this role, Julia pointed out why it is important to have a curriculum facilitator to understand the processes at the district level by sharing:

There are so many things that happen on the back end to support what teachers are doing in the classroom with students and without that support, teachers are already doing so many things and don’t have enough time to do all the things.

Building on her previous statement, she explained, “supporting teachers and how to talk with their administration and really advocate for, for themselves and for their position” (Julia, interview). Thus, having a district curriculum facilitator for each content area helps teachers to understand and navigate complexities and challenges, yet there are lessons learned throughout the policy process.

Advocacy 101

Taking collective action to advocate for the full-time curriculum facilitator position and Nancy and her team of district physical educators navigating nuances and new challenges that arise thereafter presented learning opportunities worth taking note of. Not only is it essential to build a strong coalition and nurture relationships, but the group found the utilization of data and stories within efforts both in testimony and in written advocacy efforts (e.g., letters) to be

effective. Offering advice from their personal experiences, they also share the importance of knowing who the key players are, taking advantage of professional learning opportunities from a socialization perspective, and embodying attributes needed to be a successful advocate such as persistence and passion. Whether looking at advocacy efforts to initiate the opening of the full-time curriculum facilitator position or strategies needed to navigate newer developments, interviewees shared the importance of collective action within building a coalition of dedicated physical educators and partnerships, as well as the critical role of relationship-building. For example, Julia advised:

It really comes down to relationships, and what I mean by that is building a relationship with your administration. Make sure you're talking with them. Make sure they know what you're doing. Fill them in on all of the things that are going on in, in your classroom. Invite them into your gym space.

Engaging in professional learning and development is also an important component for building relationships, making it easy to not only enhance knowledge and practice in the field but perhaps to lean on like-minded colleagues in the future when taking collective action. Julia stated, “take advantage of professional learning. Get out there, meet other people, build relationships with people, not just in your building, but across your district, across the state, across the nation.” In addition to finding like-minded, committed colleagues within the district, initiating and nurturing strategic partnerships as a coalition-building strategy was key to being more effective.

In response to the graduation flexibility proposal, Nancy and other district physical educators came together again to advocate for their subject area. Explaining this, Janelle shared, “and it's like a kid could go through high school and not take the world language, any physical

education, any like health, wellness team choices.” The group wrote a letter advocating against the proposal, she said, “maybe 15 different people, like in the wellness community have signed this letter to advocate for these content areas to not let this happen” (Janelle, interview). In addition to that letter, hopefully, for the power of collective efforts, a letter was written to district leadership in opposition to the proposal on behalf of the state health and physical education organization. An excerpt from the letter:

Research has consistently shown the numerous benefits of regular physical activity on academic performance. Students who are physically active have better concentration, memory, and classroom behavior. By removing the graduation requirements for Wellness Education, we risk compromising the academic success and overall health of our students.

As the letter alludes to, perhaps the impact of coalition-building, gaining support from not just district representatives, but colleagues at the state level, alongside supporting data will be effective to advocate for keeping physical education as a graduation requirement.

Within letters, testimonies, and regular meetings, interviewees shared the role of having strong data and meaningful stories in their efforts. Connecting to the district’s mission and values around supporting students’ mental health, Paula noted in her interview, “so to keep the focus on why that is so important and there’s so much evidence focusing on the academic link, focusing on the mental health stuff.” Additionally, aiming to demonstrate the need to support the mental and emotional well-being of students while advocating for the full-time curriculum facilitator position, they included in their letter, “to have the support from a highly qualified curriculum facilitator would take us to the next level to help our students cope with the challenges of trauma, self-regulation, and emotional intelligence.”

Paula also believed that including the voices of parents and kids was an impactful strategy. She shared:

We had a couple of parents who shared testimonial stuff about it because I think that's impactful at the end of the day. I think that's really what they want to know, and we took quotes from kids about the importance of that and I think those are really big because we say we're student-focused, but when you can provide not just the voice, but the data. But really those stories of people and show that it really does make a difference.

Related to stories from constituents and providing data, educating decision-makers about national recommendations that are supported by evidence is also necessary. Speaking in front of the district board of directors in opposition of the graduation flexibility requirement proposal, Nancy stated:

Before getting into the curriculum, I do want to be clear that athletics and health and physical education are two separate things. Athletics is for some, while health and physical education is for everyone. Also, physical activity and physical education are not the same things either. Physical education is standards-based, and physical activity is not, although we often provide a curriculum for it. Most of our students are NOT athletes, not getting the required amount of 60 minutes of movement every day based on our National standards. (artifact, script)

According to district leadership, "you know data is important, but relationship and stories are what people really what really resonates with people and what really gets action" (Tyler, interview). However, data and stories are more impactful when shared with the right "key players."

“I mean, I think you have to know who your players are” (Nancy, interview). Before the position opened, the coalition of physical educators dedicated to creating change “went to the school board before COVID started, you know, trying to push the initiative first was health, but really health and physical education. And I felt like we had some steam going” (Janelle, interview). Prior to that board meeting, the group prepared several documents and artifacts to support their case. However, Janelle and Paula shared that after that board meeting, due to the pandemic, the group felt as though they were starting from scratch again upon returning to school. Yet, they talked to the administration early on and prepared to take on higher-level conversations. Yet, Paula noted, “it was easier than we thought, but we had really prepared for, if that doesn’t happen, we will go to the school board.”

Related to knowledge of the policy process, knowing key players is essential. While understanding who the decision-makers are is an important aspect of learning how to advocate effectively, interviewees also shared the role of various attributes needed to remain successful throughout the process.

Navigating the policy process required patience, perseverance, and persistence, qualities that were critical in sustaining advocacy efforts. The complexity and slow pace of policy change made patience important, while commitment to the cause, despite various challenges, emphasized the need for perseverance. In addition, remaining engaged and being willing and able to adjust tactics, sometimes relatively quickly, showed the importance of persistence and flexibility. When interviewing Nancy, the word “passionate” came up quite frequently. Speaking about her reaction to the graduation flexibility proposal and referring back to “what is best for kids,” Nancy authentically shared:

My first reaction is to get mad and fired up because that's not what's best for kids. And so we always go back. I always, always, always go back to what is best for kids. And that's the ones I try to see everything through. And so in my soul of souls, uh, my professional passion is that we want to provide quality opportunities for students to move and be lifelong movers.

In terms of advocacy work, she said she has “learned not to be so passionate at the time and emotional” (Nancy, interview), explaining that she needs to set her personal feelings aside at times to remain even-keeled.

With regard to persistence, Janelle spoke of her years of experience in both the district and the field. She indicated, “you need the squeaky wheel.” Reflecting persistence, passion, and a commitment to the teachers she supports, Nancy shared there are things that “are specifically utilized for our district and running into different barriers, but I will find a way to get through.” Lastly, Paula recognized the need for ongoing advocacy efforts, especially related to the field of physical education. She noted, “I need to say that it sounds depressing, but like it's not a one-and-done. It's a continuous effort.” The group of advocates that shared their story did not lack persistence, patience, or passion, and reflected on those qualities as key attributes for future policy actors.

Summary

District-level policy advocacy work revolved around “what is best for students” while embracing the concept of the whole child, rationalizing the need for resources at the district level, the need to navigate the policy process, and strategies and lessons learned throughout their journey (i.e., advocacy 101). From the commitment to placing students first and supporting the whole child to the journey of securing a full-time curriculum facilitator role, the physical

educators' story sheds light on their dedication to elevating physical education within their district, and as a field. Despite facing marginalization, strategic uses of data, storytelling, relationship-building, and mentorship from curriculum facilitators to understand the policy process within the district, show the need for a persistent, yet resilient advocacy approach. This story not only shows the importance of overcoming barriers while uncovering nuances within the policy process, but helps to highlight attributes such as persistence, passion, and patience necessary to equip future policy actors.

Macro-Level

The macro-level case study was a story about a coalition of passionate educators and advocates aimed to reshape the policy landscape of physical education in their state. Led by key stakeholders, this narrative detailed the advocacy strategies, timeline, and complexities of the legislative process at the state level. By building a strong, diverse coalition and securing a grant from the state health foundation, the group worked closely with an advocacy consultant to garner support from legislators to pass a bill for a physical education pilot allowing schools to implement a model policy in pursuit of increasing access to quality physical education for *all* students in the state. Table 6 illustrates the story map for the macro level.

Table 6*Macro-Level Story Map*

Characters	Setting
<p>Heroes: Joyce, Paige, James, Jordan, Kelsey, Senator Miller, and their colleagues within the coalition</p> <p>Villains: Systemic barriers (e.g., local control), legislative inertia, undervaluation, & marginalization of physical education</p>	Variety of environments (schools, school districts, State House, and State Senate)
Plot/Problem	Moral of the Story
Due to local control & other systemic barriers, students in the state do not have equitable access to quality physical education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Power of collective action/coalition-building with strategic partnerships - Importance of persistence - Having the right people in the right positions at the right time (e.g., advocacy consultant, etc.)

Meet the Characters*Joyce*

Initially aspiring to be an art teacher, Joyce discovered her passion for physical education during her university years, thanks to a mentor's guidance. This passion led her to a fulfilling career spanning nearly three decades in a large public school district, where she taught physical education. Striving to improve physical education for kids in her state, her experience expanded into the legislative aspects of advocacy as she assumed a major role in leading efforts to impact policy to enhance physical education at the state level.

Paige

Paige has served as a faculty member in a PETE program. With a love of sports, Paige's journey into physical education began by chance, as she decided to pursue physical education as her major. In addition to teaching secondary physical education, her career evolved into

opportunities to engage in policy work through state standards revision processes, continuing her education and academic pursuits, and active involvement in professional organizations. Paige's commitment to enhancing physical education and ability to conduct and share meaningful research has positioned her well to serve in a pivotal role in the advocacy work.

James

Finding passion in physical education, James's career initially focused on coaching. Transitioning from secondary to elementary education, he found his true passion. James's joy of teaching and shaping young lives led him to pursue other ways to positively impact the health and well-being of children, one of which includes serving in a leadership role for the state's health and physical education professional organization.

Kelsey

A partner at a policy advocacy group, Kelsey has served as the advocacy consultant for a state health and physical education organization, dedicating over a decade to promoting physical education. Firmly believing in the transformative role of education in society, she has served many clients, yet Kelsey's work with physical educators stands out as an area of which she is very passionate. Her commitment to advancing educational equity and knowledge of the legislative process make her an extremely valuable asset to the project.

Jordan

With a background in middle school physical education and further education in administration, Jordan has advocated for quality physical education through curriculum development and policy advocacy. Aiming to ensure all students have access to physical education that supports their holistic development, Jordan was a critical member of the coalition to testify and advocate for physical education as part of a student's well-rounded education.

Leah

With a background in exercise physiology and a focus on prevention and outreach in healthcare, Leah has dedicated nearly a decade to enhancing physical activity among youth. Her research related to increasing children's physical activity and obesity intervention studies and her work with a children's hospital makes her a strong member of the coalition within the project.

Senator Miller

Senator Miller's journey into politics was an accident, beginning with tragedy when her husband, a former high school principal, unexpectedly passed away while serving as a state representative. Initially reluctant, she agreed to fill her husband's vacancy and after serving in the House, she transitioned to the state Senate. Though her background is in education as opposed to public policy, she has successfully navigated the complexities of lawmaking due to her supportive networks. Senator Miller is passionate about education, and is a champion of physical education, making her a key stakeholder in the bill passage process.

The Story: Improving Access to Quality Physical Education Through a Statewide Pilot Project

Amidst the Rocky Mountain region in the United States, a coalition motivated by the disparity in physical education access and quality set out on an advocacy journey to change policies in their state. The coalition was led by heroes: Joyce, Paige, James, Jordan, Kelsey, Senator Miller, and their dedicated colleagues within partnering organizations and schools who advocated diligently. However, like many stories, there are villains, not in the form of individuals, but as systemic barriers that manifest through budget constraints, legislative processes, and a general marginalization of physical education within the education system. These barriers make advocating an uphill battle, but the coalition has kept students at the forefront of their mission. The victims in this story are the students, particularly those in

underserved communities, who suffer the consequences of barriers within the system and lack access to quality physical education. Due to the patchwork of policies pertaining to physical education in schools and school districts in the state, this lack of consistency and absence of a state-wide mandate has resulted in disparities in students' access to quality physical education. The plot unfolds as a story of dedicated, passionate advocates who, despite various challenges, navigate through the complexities, nuances, and unknowns of the legislative process with perseverance and strategic efforts.

The story began in October 2018, with the initiation of the bill drafting process, a hopeful start toward changing physical education policies. Inspired to change this landscape, the state's health and physical education organization, led by James as executive director, and backed by grant funding from a health foundation and supported by Kelsey, a professional advocacy consultant, pursued legislative action. Through strategic conversations during the state-level advocacy day, it was in Senator Miller's office that the idea for a pilot was formed. The physical education pilot House bill was crafted through collaborative efforts among state health and physical education organizations, the coalition, and bipartisan bill sponsors. The bill aimed to provide 3 years of funding for schools to implement quality physical education programs based on a model policy, including an evaluation component to assess health outcomes and academic success. According to Kelsey, using her expertise in policy consulting, successful bills often stem from a pilot in efforts to prove whether they are feasible or not in schools.

Partnering with the state health and physical education organization, the advocacy coalition included several organizations such as a heart health organization, a children's hospital, a wellness advocacy group, a children's advocacy organization, an education reform group, and an educators' association, among others. With the help of Kelsey to traverse through the

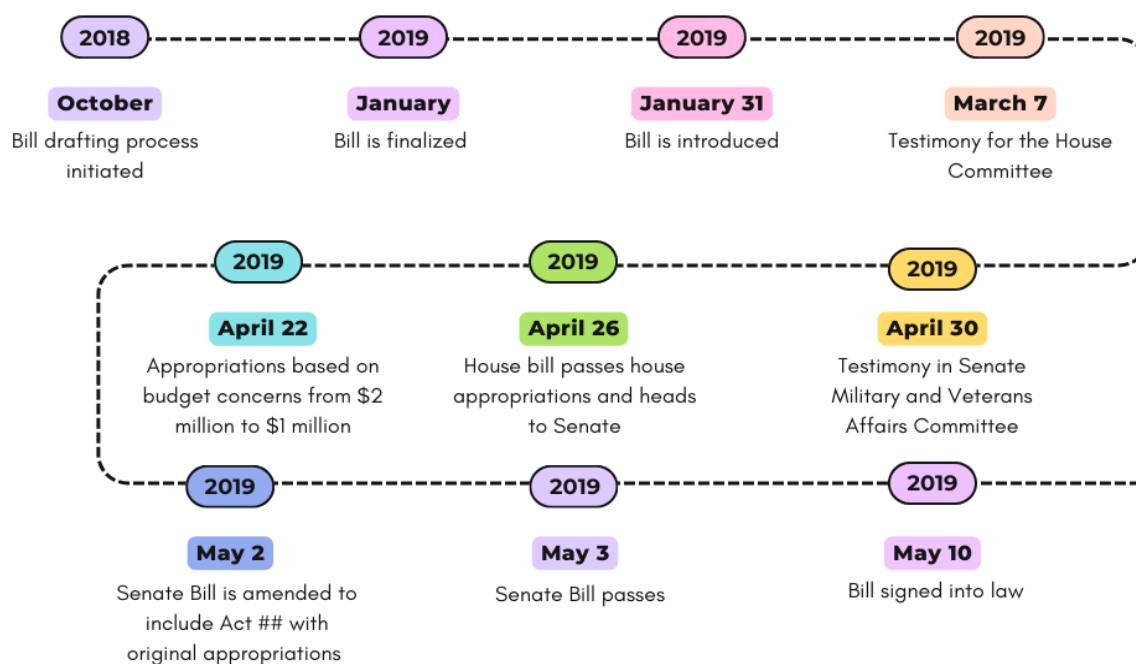
complexities of the policy process, the bill was introduced in January 2019. Later, in March 2019, the coalition hosted an advocacy day where the bill garnered support. Armed with data and powerful stories, advocates like Leah, Jordan, and Paige testified before the House Education Committee, where it needed to be read three times. Leah, leaning on her experience with policy work at the children's hospital, shared her research about the importance of physical education and physical activity as it relates to obesity prevention. Jordan, former middle school physical educator and administrator, advocated for the role of physical education within a student's comprehensive education experience. Paige and Joyce made a great duo. Joyce, the passionate retired physical educator that she is, pulled at heart strings of legislators, Paige backed her up with strong evidence to support those narratives, using her expertise in teaching and scholarship as a PETE faculty member. Yet, what may have been most impactful was hearing firsthand why physical education is important from the voices of constituents: kids. With overwhelming support, the bill passed unanimously.

The journey of the House bill through the legislative process was a learning experience, with the bill eventually amended into the School Finance Act due to budgetary constraints from \$2M to \$1M. This amendment lowered the financial requirement but maintained the pilot program's intent. In May 2019, the bill was signed into law and the pilot program was handed over to the State Department of Education to be managed and implemented. Figure 3 describes the timeline of the physical education pilot project. This legislative achievement, though monumental, represented just one phase in the ongoing efforts to elevate the importance of physical education within the state. Leaders of the project, Joyce, Paige, and James, point to the coalition's strategic and intentional capacity building, including partners from various sectors, as instrumental in the bill's passage.

The group learned many lessons along the way while navigating the legislative process related to the importance of coalition strength, diverse advocacy strategies, and proactive partnership building. While each character has held a different role, they have not only shared the same vision for *all* kids to have access to quality physical education, but they shared attributes of patience, persistence, and adaptation. Moving forward, the state health and physical education organization remained focused on securing additional funding and developing training to support school applications for the pilot program. The ultimate goal has not just been the success of the pilot but meaningful policy change to ensure quality physical education for all students in the state. The moral of the story is clear: through collective efforts, strategic action, and a shared vision, it is possible to overcome systemic barriers and advocate for meaningful change.

Figure 3

Physical Education Pilot Project Timeline



Macro-Level Themes

Three major themes capturing physical education stakeholders' experience in policy advocacy work at the state level were identified: (a) Strategic coalition-building: The right people "around the table", (b) a clear ask: Improved access to quality physical education, and (c) advocacy approaches: leveraging stories, data, and tailoring the message for impact. Through the use of story mapping, a critical aspect of the narrative was not only determining which stakeholders were involved but also the various roles they held as it relates to the coalition and its mission. Upon establishing the setting and the plot, it became essential to establish what the coalition was advocating for and what led to the need for the project. Lastly and perhaps most importantly, the strategies used throughout the process are key to the lessons learned within the story.

Strategic Coalition-Building: The Right People "Around the Table"

The creation and success of the physical education coalition were attributed to the coalition's diverse makeup and active engagement through the policy advocacy process. The coalition comprised the state health and physical education organization and several other partners (e.g., a children's hospital, charter school association, heart health organization, children's advocacy campaign, state educators' association) as outlined in the Google folder with detailed plans for each phase of the project, and a critical character within the story: Kelsey. According to all participants interviewed, hiring a professional advocacy consultant for the state health and physical education organization was key to not only general advocacy efforts but also to navigating the complexities of the legislative process. In a focus group interview, James expressed:

Having that type of person and that type of organization representing us and informing us that the capital has made all the difference because they understand physical education and they understand the legislative piece, it's been huge, huge, huge, huge.

Grant monies from the state health foundation were used not only to incentivize Kelsey for her work, but to compensate Joyce, as the project coordinator to spearhead grassroots advocacy initiatives, and to support K-12 teachers to attend lobby days by offering reimbursement to substitute teachers. A variety of stakeholders and groups need to be at the table, and as Paige pointed out, PETE faculty are often better positioned to engage in policy work. Regarding schedules and from the perspective of a researcher, she explained:

I had the capacity to be more involved than some other people, like on the board because my schedule was a little bit more flexible. I could contribute from the research standpoint and the evaluation standpoint to the development of those things. (Paige, focus group interview)

During the focus group, Joyce agreed with Paige, "It took somebody you know, feet on the floor, working it all that for that few months there, it was intense and really would be difficult if you didn't have your days free, you know" (Joyce, focus group interview). Beyond being personally interested in policy work, Paige viewed policy work as part of her job within the scope of teaching, research, and service as she shared, "[advocacy work] kind of blurred the service and the research aspects. You know? And I also teach classes" (Paige, interview). Alluding to who else should be involved in policy work and making her point clear as to why she integrates policy education into PETE, Paige articulated:

I wanted to be involved because I wanted to create a greater, better climate for my future students who are going to be future teachers, right? You know, I mean we don't tell them

this in the program, but you don't even have to be certified in P.E. to teach P.E. in most places in [state name], so it's like what's the point in what we're doing in higher education if the policies don't support.

All participants agreed that this project and advocacy work more broadly takes a village. Leah shared the foundation of their collaboration as the children's hospital conducts a community health needs assessment every 3 years, "every time we do this assessment, physical activity, and nutrition come up as a priority," highlighting the shared mission of developing healthy citizens. Their diverse backgrounds of coalition members allowed for a comprehensive approach to advocacy, from teachers on the ground, higher education faculty, and various organizations to come from different angles, yet several participants shared the importance of having the right people at the right time, perhaps unique to the context of this story. Paige conveyed this point, "there was a lot of things that really were working in our favor at that exact moment in time in [State]. And then the people that we had around the table to contribute" (Paige, focus group interview). James and Joyce agreed that it is important to have the right people in the right positions, including the right starters.

In addition to the advocacy consultant and coalition itself, the project would not have been possible if it were not for the championing of various legislators. According to Paige, the idea for a pilot bill was first established in Senator Miller's office:

We were in her office and she said, well, we just need to create a pilot program. And so that was the first time that the idea for the actual physical education pilot came out was at our advocacy day in 2017. (Paige, focus group interview, artifacts, photo, social media post)

The coalition's effectiveness was strengthened by its cross-sector collaboration, incorporating expertise from various fields. While each stakeholder holds a different position, they were connected by a shared vision. Circling back to Kelsey's critical role, Joyce shared, "Kelsey's strength is gathering people for a common vision, and that was an amazing and incredible opportunity for us." Part of having the right people at the table meant drawing on various stakeholder's strengths. Paige explained, "Because there were people that had different strengths at different things. So some people were really good at gathering the evidence that we needed or getting the right people to the testimonies and different things." The coalition was strong due to its diverse makeup and strategic efforts, in addition to approaching such efforts at the right time. Affirming the need for collective action, Senator Miller noted her personal efforts, "The stakeholder process is huge. I brought in other legislators, people from the community so they would understand what I was trying to achieve and I think that's one of the reasons this got elevated." She continued, "My suggestion would be to get as many people involved as possible" (Senator Miller, interview).

A Clear "Ask": Improving Access to Quality Physical Education

Central to the advocacy efforts behind the pilot project was the clear objective to enhance both the access to and the quality of physical education within the state. Stemming from initial conversations between Joyce and the state health foundation to secure funding, strategic planning and backing from Kelsey, and support from legislators, the initiative was driven by a recognition of physical education's marginalization and the evident disparities in access and quality across different schools. Paige reflected on the nuanced goals of their advocacy, emphasizing the importance of focusing on qualified, licensed physical education teachers as a key aspect of delivering quality physical education, a policy lacking in the state. Upon asking Joyce how the

project evolved and why she was engaged, she shared her experience in a large district where she noticed inequities, “it seemed like at some of the richer schools more well off, they had more access to physical education.” Elaborating, she continued, “and that coalition had a heart to see that every child has quality physical education, no matter what” (Joyce, Interview).

The coalition worked towards ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, had access to quality physical education. Joyce’s efforts to shed light on disparities in access and quality physical education as the overarching aim of ensuring equitable physical education for all students. She shared:

You know, but if you were in a poor neighborhood, you didn’t have very much P.E. because you had to do all the other things. You know ELA [English Language Arts] classes and remedial math and that kind of thing. And so when I was out on the field, it just really hurt my heart to see kids not enjoy going to school. (Joyce, interview)

The group aimed to improve access to quality physical education, but the pilot project would help to develop a “clear ask” upon gathering data about the implementation of model policies in schools. Providing a rationale for the physical education pilot, in their letter to the State Board of Education on behalf of the state’s health and physical education organization, they wrote:

We are writing in support of the [physical education pilot], which was research-driven and scientifically based, and received strong bipartisan support when passed. Quality physical education is an essential building block for children to attain lifelong health, wellness, and educational success. (artifacts, letter, presentation)

Letters written to educate about and advocate for the importance of quality physical education and its critical role in children’s development were crucial aspects of developing a clear “ask.”

Thinking ahead to the end goal and what potential “asks” might stem from the evaluation, Jordan, former administrator and active member of the coalition, shared, “it’s a collective answer, but I hope it’s minimum access.” Acknowledging the reality that there will continue to be budget constraints and the general feasibility of what policies should come first, she asked a great question, “they’re going to come back and say we can’t do all the things. So what is the most important?” Elaborating on the notion that “asks” must be realistic and pointing to the reason for the pilot more broadly, she said:

We can prove things. But like, do we just want a minimum of minutes? Is that what we’re asking for or are we asking for more? You know, I think that’s kind of the most important part. Is your end goal and being very clear and realistic? (Jordan, interview)

Further, determining what to ask not only needs to be feasible but the current landscape of the state must be considered. In their letter to the Joint Budget Committee, the coalition provided context about the reality of physical education:

Unfortunately, many school districts across the state have either eliminated physical education or drastically cut the time spent by students in this important course. The time is now to shift this trend. I urge you to approve [State] Department of Education’s request for an additional \$1.1M for [physical education pilot program]. (artifact, letter)

Through a variety of different strategies, the coalition was successful in having a clear objective and plan to work towards stronger policies to support access to quality physical education.

Advocacy Approaches: Leveraging Stories, Data, and Tailoring the Message for Impact

The coalition’s strategic advocacy was characterized by blending a variety of engaging narratives and strong evidence. By leveraging meaningful, personal stories, particularly from students, in conjunction with robust data, the coalition was able to advocate effectively for the

passage of the House bill. In addition to the use of storytelling and supporting data, advocates tailored their messages to their audience and learned along the way the importance of persistence, patience, and adaptation through the policy process.

The use of storytelling, especially from students, was an effective strategy in humanizing the policy debate and demonstrating the real-world impacts of policy decisions on their constituents. Paige emphasized the power of stories, stating, “The stories were more impactful than the data.” Additionally, comparing this to her work with the children’s hospital, Leah noted, “I use human interest stories when I’m testifying on behalf of children all the time because I feel like that’s what tugs at the heartstrings of the legislators like, that’s what makes the difference for them to stand up and notice” (Leah, interview; artifact, photo). Highlighting the ways teachers on the ground can use stories to amplify their voices and those of students to advocate using other modes of communication, Jordan described, “We had three stories that we’ve collected and sent out in long form, but one of them was for adapted P.E. kind of just highlighting the program that exists and how it impacts kids.” Collecting material from teachers and their students is worthwhile as she continued, “Any kind of story collection is, you know, very important to the process of them understanding you know impact” (Jordan, interview). Solidifying the impact of stories, Senator Miller shared, “Some of the bills that I remember most, I remember because of the stories I heard, and as I recall, the young kids who came to talk about why physical education was so important to them.” As she continued to reflect, she elaborated, “Some people on the committee said that they were swayed to vote yes because of the testimony, and that happens a lot. It’s the fact from it’s that human element that’s so important” (Senator Miller, interview).

Beyond storytelling, the use of evidence was also a successful advocacy strategy, and a necessary aspect of the evaluation component, especially if they wanted to prove that physical education should be a priority for legislators. Kelsey explained:

It should be something that's prioritized, and knowing the budget implications what we came up with was that we wanted to run a pilot program to be able to showcase what quality physical education does for the student, not just in their physical education course.

In the focus group, executive director, James noted:

The bills were starting to become drafted and we were sending feedback kind of back and forth and I think I was specifically focusing mostly on the evaluation component and ensuring that it was something that we could actually collect good data on.

Further, Joyce affirmed, "We're not just talking the talk, but we actually believe in what we say and we believe in our steps. How will we know if successful? I think that data will show it."

Speaking of collecting and using data to drive decision-making (e.g., a pilot study), Senator Miller shared, "I got so many amazing responses from other legislators about what we were doing and how brilliant this was to have a pilot study."

In their advocacy materials, the coalition provided statistics like, "71% of young Americans don't meet the military's physical requirement" and "Success Story: 87% FRL; Schedule change to give students daily access to P.E.; Results: High Growth on Test scores; Decrease of behavior referrals" (artifact, presentation) in their presentation to the Senate. In addition, they provided anecdotal quotes from teachers reporting access to physical education and other data about the current landscape in their "Cuts in P.E." and "Changes in [State]

Presentation” materials (artifact, presentation). Referring back to determining the ‘ask’ once the evaluation component concludes, Kelsey offered her expertise:

We’re not in a position to be able to go and mandate this. That is an enormous effort, and also one that I imagine school districts would fight. I mean, at the time, and I’m sure even now you know, that is an enormous amount of revenue to pay for mandatory physical education. And so, I believe that you have to build support. Like I said, you have to build support and momentum for a longer-term plan and we need the data because the argument right now is, kids can’t read, kids can’t do math, and those should be the focus of the school day. And so if we know that quality physical education contributes to better outcomes in those core areas, yeah. Then make the case.

Yet, to accompany those data, James shared that they “looked at the data and the research and the local case studies that they put together as well. So most everything was leaned back on the coalition because the legislators wanted to hear local stories” (James, focus group interview).

Thus, using data were effective, but alongside stories was even more impactful as Joyce explained, “because I think the stories you know is where we actually see change, right”?

Regardless of the use of data and/or story, the need for tailored messaging is essential.

Sharing the importance of physical education through the use of data and stories was effective, but knowing one’s audience, their values, and how they make decisions is critical to the policy advocacy process. Speaking from her experience in policy-related work at the children’s hospital, Leah said:

I do change the message and then just making sure that, you know, when we’re out advocating for this to make sure that we find an element that the human connection can be made and then we can combine with data like we all know data speaks.

Thus, before meeting with legislators, it is important to “do your homework” so to speak. In agreement, Paige explained, “I feel like you have to be like someone who can persuasively deliver messages and understand being able to adjust to the context, right?” Continuing her thought, she shared that sometimes they needed to “deliver messages that you don’t fully necessarily agree with based off of, like your values or philosophies, but to sort of get the message across” (Paige, interview).

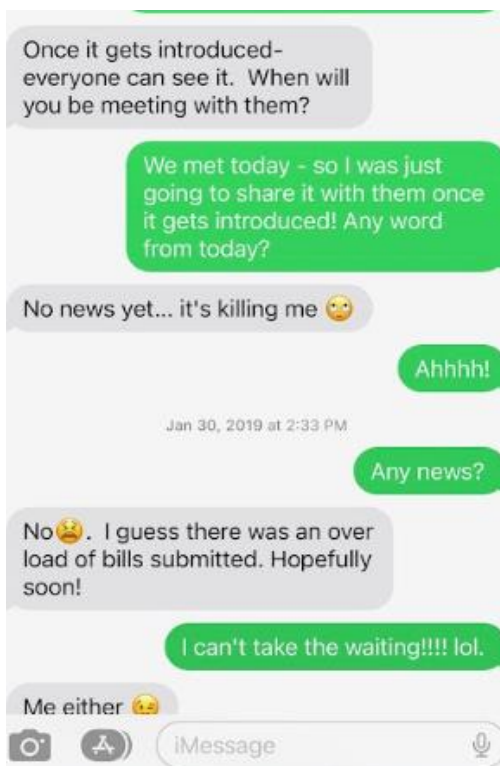
To illustrate the point, she discussed how a certain legislator was particularly interested in the ways more physical education might impact sleep, yet she noted that there was not strong evidence to support that. She noted that it was necessary to learn on the fly and remembered Kelsey told her, “if we have to put sleep in there, you know, we have to like, learn this kind of way of sort of appeasing all the people that were involved in it.” According to the consultant with formal policy education training, she disclosed, “as the advocate, you have to know which legislators care about these things, which legislators are willing you know, to voice support at the right time” (Kelsey, interview). While tailoring the message is important, it is also essential to be patient and flexible and remain persistent through the process.

Navigating the unknowns and hurdles within the policy process required the coalition to exhibit persistence, patience, and a willingness to adapt. The complexity of the legislative process requires not only resilience, but determination, and passion. Upon asking Leah in her interview about the lessons learned by engaging in the project, she shared, “perseverance and collective efforts with strategic people.” On a similar note, Jordan noted that one needs, “patience and perseverance. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And make sure to take a vacation afterward.” Also acknowledging that policy advocacy is hard work, especially when dealing with the discomfort of what is in the hands of decision-makers, she commented, “you know perseverance,

dedication, and patience, because there's so much that is out of your control." Expanding, she stated, "so patience and intuitiveness, like willingness to know or to be OK with things that are outside of your control" (Jordan, interview; artifact, text message). Shedding light on the persistence needed throughout the process, in the focus group, Joyce revealed, "it took several drafts and that's normal and working with that bill drafter for the state." Text messages between Joyce and Paige illustrate the ways advocates on the ground feel in anticipation of navigating the messiness and unknowns, presented in Figure 4. The initiation of the physical education pilot project was not a quick process, and it was nuanced, yet the stakeholders involved in the project exhibited the right traits alongside strategic efforts to be successful in the passage of the bill.

Figure 4

Text Messages



Summary

This advocacy journey for quality physical education helps to convey the complexities of policy in reality at the state level concerning strategic efforts, coalition dynamics, collective efforts, and attributes needed to be an effective advocate. Central to their success was a coalition with a shared vision and a well-defined mission advocating for both access to and quality of physical education through the use of compelling narratives and robust data. Through this story, we learn the importance of establishing the right team, understanding the audience, tailoring the message, and using a strategic mix of personal stories and evidence to advocate for change, offering valuable insights for future policy actors in the field of physical education and beyond.

Overall Summary

Across the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels, the stories of striving to improve quality physical education help to uncover the complexities of policy in reality with underlying themes of resilience, innovative advocacy, and considerations for the need to redefine physical education. At the micro-level, dedicated and driven physical educators like Alex demonstrated how innovative approaches toward navigating sub-par circumstances can result in not only a school that truly values physical education and movement more broadly, but the importance of relationships, open-mindedness, and the impact of data-informed approaches toward garnering support for physical education and physical activity experiences. At the meso-level, advocates like Nancy, Paula, Janelle, and Julia navigated systemic barriers and administrative resistance within the district to advocate for the role of physical education within the curriculum, as it relates to a student's well-rounded education. At the macro level, a strong, diverse coalition led by champions like Joyce, Paige, and James engaged in legislative advocacy to change policy in their state to enhance access to quality physical education, pointing to the collective effort

necessary to drive systemic change. Across all levels, each story sheds light on the importance of persistence, innovative strategies, and a unified, shared vision to ensure that physical education is recognized as an essential component of a well-rounded education, advocating for equitable access and the promotion of lifelong wellness among students.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation aimed to explore stakeholders' experiences and engagement in physical education policy work in the United States. Specifically, this study sought to answer the research question:

- Q1 What are the stories and experiences of stakeholders engaged in physical education policy work at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels?

The researcher set out on a qualitative journey combining case study and narrative inquiry to gain a deep, comprehensive understanding of stakeholders' policy advocacy stories within a school-level case, district-level case, and state-level case. Drawing on concepts from the NPF as a lens was useful not only in exploring the extent to which storytelling was used as a strategy in participants' advocacy efforts but also in how the researcher, narrated these experiences to make sense of the stories and offer insights for future policy work. The NPF's emphasis on the role of human stories in learning and the influence of policy (Jones et al., 2022) served as a guide in the analysis and a medium for comprehending the stakeholders' narratives and articulating these stories as the researcher. This approach was important for helping to uncover the nuances that appeared throughout the policy advocacy processes to better understand how such narratives can help to equip future policy actors. The process of story mapping--identifying characters, setting, plot, and the moral of each story helped organize and frame the context and meaning within the case stories, thus, gaining a deep understanding of stakeholders' policy advocacy work at each level (Crow & Jones, 2018; Polkinghorne, 1988; Shanahan et al., 2015).

Micro-Level: Advocacy within the School Building

Alex's role as a "movement specialist" resonated with the broader literature on the importance of advocacy, especially about physical educators as policy actors. While the notion that many physical educators did not consider themselves policy actors (Lorusso et al., 2020), Alex's story proved to be a unique case. His innovative integration of cross-curricular content into his physical education program and collaborative nature with school-wide initiatives demonstrates the kind of holistic, data-informed programming that scholars embracing school-based physical activity promotion, as it relates to advocacy efforts in the field of physical education, encourage (Carson et al., 2020; McKenzie & Lounsbery, 2013). In efforts to achieve the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day, many schools across the country have adopted frameworks such as Comprehensive School Physical Activity Programs to provide access to physical activity opportunities before, during, and after school (Carson et al., 2020). The innovative ways in which Alex integrated non-traditional activities, gardening, and agriculture into his physical education curriculum speak to his ability to show the credibility of his program within the school and school community. Due to overcrowding and competing subjects, his students can go 5 weeks without seeing the inside of a gymnasium between units. Thus, Alex has needed to get creative in his efforts to not only advocate for physical education but for kids to move more outside of physical education class.

In line with the work of McKenzie and Lounsbery (2013), Alex's story supported the idea of teacher effectiveness in a public health context, emphasizing the expanded role of physical educators as physical activity leaders. The authors argued that, since promoting lifelong physical activity was a key curriculum goal, teachers must demonstrate physical activity outcomes in efforts to ultimately make an impact from a public health perspective. Though Alex

would likely take steps toward implementing many of the school-wide initiatives to promote wellness and physical activity within and beyond the school day even if policies and scheduling allowed for students to have daily physical education, he has navigated these sub-par circumstances effectively, and he uses data. When asking Alex, Susan, and Samantha about how Alex has been successful in garnering support for his efforts among not just classroom teachers, but also administrators, they pointed to the ways he not only builds strong relationships but collects and shows heart rate data compared to academic test score data to illustrate that active kids are better learners. Alex mentioned that he also uses storytelling in his advocacy efforts, however, the stories are usually being told through the building, in the community, and even in the news via students, parents, and local editors highlighting his work. Consistent with the NPF, the combination of evidence with storytelling was shown to be an effective advocacy strategy (Crow & Jones, 2018). This micro-level story provides a compelling argument for future conversations about redefining physical education, emphasizing the role of educators as frontline policy actors whose innovative practices and whole-of-school approaches advocate for a broader understanding and appreciation of physical education's value, particularly when navigating sub-par policies.

Meso-Level: Advocacy within the School District

At the district level, this story shed light on the complexities of the policy advocacy process in two ways: Advocating for the full-time health and physical education curriculum facilitator position, and the efforts to overcome challenges thereafter. According to Nancy, Janelle, and Paula, battles against strains of marginalization is a consistent fight within the district, and society more broadly, in line with literature suggesting marginalization of the field (Hardman, 2013; van der Mars et al., 2021), and the critical need for more physical educators,

teacher educators, and other stakeholders to step up to serve as policy actors. This story also highlighted strategies such as providing evidence to support claims, backed by powerful stories from not just teachers, but parents, students, and community members; this was shown to be effective (Crow & Jones, 2018) as groups utilized various modes of advocacy (e.g., attending board meetings, writing letters) in their efforts.

However, crucial to areas in which they were successful, especially in advocating for the full-time curriculum facilitator position, was learning about the policy process. Dedicated teachers, such as Paula and Janelle, experienced increased learning and confidence through their ongoing engagement. This process aligns with the legitimate peripheral participation theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Janelle showed this by highlighting their proactive efforts to impact change and take control, rather than being passive recipients of decisions made by district leaders. While they gradually moved from observing and understanding district-level policy processes to actively influencing them, they also spoke to the importance of both Julia and Nancy knowing the steps within the advocacy process at the district level having served in the curriculum facilitator position. In accordance with Lorusso et al. (2020), engagement in policy work is impacted by knowledge of the policy process; this runs true within this story.

As Nancy supports district teachers by providing professional development, advocating for enhanced curricula, writing grants, and serving as their voice, they face a major challenge: The graduation flexibility requirement proposal. This proposal could allow students to graduate without taking health education, physical education, or fine arts classes. At the school board meeting, Nancy asks how the district plans to meet SHAPE America standards if these subjects are cut from graduation requirements.

In response, school board members might emphasize the necessity of prioritizing core academic subjects due to budget cuts, enrollment challenges, and competing priorities. They could justify the proposal by arguing that limited funding requires reallocating resources to areas with a higher immediate impact on student achievement. The board might also highlight the difficulty of balancing diverse educational needs within the constraints of the current budget, suggesting that while health education, physical education, and fine arts are valuable, difficult decisions must be made to ensure the overall sustainability and effectiveness of the district's educational programs. Important to note for advocacy efforts, the district is located in a state with decentralized governance and localized decision-making, which allows for adaptability, such as districts making their own decisions due to no state-level mandates. In accordance with the literature, this meso-level story serves as an example of a disparity in enforceability for compliance with national recommendations, ultimately hindering the effectiveness of these policies.

Unfortunately, also tying into literature dating back three decades ago, Sparkes et al. (1993) expressed concerns about physical education's low status within the school curriculum as compared to other subject areas, as well as Locke and Siedentop's (1997) work pointing out the way legislators continue to question the requirements of physical education, and surprisingly, many have accepted the notion of merely maintaining a presence in the schools as a triumph, rather than striving to strengthen curricula. Though legislators are not questioning physical education requirements in this story per se, district leadership is questioning whether or not physical education should remain a graduation requirement. Upon sharing that physical education and wellness are valued in the district, Tyler shared the realities of the evolving education landscape, and that students are often able to get "physical education experiences"

through club sports. This reply is consistent with what van der Mars stated in his 2021 paper regarding physical education's competitors potentially being youth sports, personal trainers, and coaches. The persistent advocacy against the marginalization of physical education, despite barriers within the system, extends the literature as it introduces practical applications of strategic advocacy efforts, illustrated by this story and informed by knowledge of the policy process.

As Scanlon et al. (2022) explored conceptualizations and practices of policy work in the field, they emphasized the need for more policy-related professional development. The journey to secure a full-time curriculum facilitator role illustrates the complexities of navigating the policy process at the meso-level, echoing the need for policy education in PETE programs, as well as professional development settings, as highlighted by Scanlon et al. (2022). To address the professional development needs of teachers and PETE faculty, Mitchell et al. (2021) emphasized that formal planning for desirable futures is essential due to rapid societal changes, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and social justice movements. Perhaps a series of webinars might be helpful, focusing on planning for the future, emphasizing practical, evidence-based methods, while encouraging unity through diversity to inspire future improvements for the common good.

Macro-Level: Statewide Advocacy Efforts

The formation and strategic efforts of the coalition in this story reveal the importance of coalition-building in achieving policy goals, resonating with Lorusso et al. (2020) called for increased capacity among stakeholders to engage in policy work. In alignment with the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), this example demonstrates a diverse coalition's strategic engagement over several years to navigate complexities within the legislative process at the state level in working toward policy change. Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier (1994) pointed to a

successful ACF being characterized by a shared belief in the importance of physical education, as present in this story, with a long-term collaboration across various schools, institutions, and organizations to influence governmental decisions.

As the theme centered around the importance of “doing the homework” and tailoring the message to the audience within this story, the presence of varied perspectives related to the goals of physical education arises as a consideration. This notion of the field’s “muddled vision” is perhaps correlated to the lack of progress toward policy development, implementation, and change (van der Mars, 2021), yet the need to alter advocacy efforts based on the stakeholder’s values is an important lesson. For instance, Paige mentioned that a legislator cared deeply about the benefits of sleep in improving physical education in the state, and though she and other advocates within the coalition knew there was not much evidence to support that claim, they tailored their message accordingly to advance their agenda. This concept is critical, especially within the field of physical education, as though perspectives among policy actors may vary, finding a common ground for defining policy problems is important for advancing policy research and practice, and for increasing advocacy efforts (Penney, 2017).

Similar to the position of the district-level challenges related to graduation requirements that stem from the state’s local control, the reasons for initiating the physical education pilot project stem from disparities and inconsistencies in access to quality programs across the state. In their efforts, the coalition gave careful consideration to what evidence would be most impactful in justifying the value of physical education, which was especially effective by securing a grant to compensate a professional advocacy consultant, as well as a facilitator to organize and plan advocacy efforts. Recognizing that students, particularly in low-income neighborhoods, did not appear to have the same access to quality physical education as those

who lived in areas associated with higher socio-economic status, the coalition's mission aligned with work by Landi et al. (2021) toward ensuring that students have the right to equitable opportunities and access to physical education for their physical, social, and personal development. The catalyst for the project's mission correlated with the argument that Landi et al. (2021) made more broadly for policy research to address the complexities and lived experiences of individuals in the field.

Though the coalition has been successful in the passage of the bill, state-level advocacy efforts and advances in establishing policies are still forthcoming. While the hope was that physical education mandates became a reality in their state, An et al. (2021) pointed out that state laws regarding physical education were only as effective as the schools and districts that implemented them. In developing their "asks," stakeholders involved should give due consideration to the development, execution, and compliance with physical education policies. It is essential to approach these efforts with a focus on equity. This story illustrates the triumphs of Joyce, Paige, and their coalition while pointing to the effectiveness of using evidence and stories within the advocacy process. Moreover, diverse, and strategic coalition-building was a critical aspect of the group's success in navigating the complexities and nuances within the legislative landscape, building on the strengths of each stakeholder through the process through the shared mission of improving the quality and access to physical education in their state.

Looking Across Cases

Similarities

Across the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels, the concept of resilience against systemic challenges and general marginalization was threaded through each story, present in much of the literature within the field (Hardman, 2013; van der Mars et al., 2021). Regardless of the context,

whether it be a single school's dedicated physical educator working to overcome barriers to provide quality physical education and physical activity opportunities, district-level advocates pushing for a full-time curriculum facilitator and working through challenges and administrative resistance thereafter, or a state-level coalition navigating legislative complexities, there was a commitment to elevating the quality and accessibility of physical education for *all* students within a local-control state. Each story points to the importance of strategic planning, as well as attributes such as passion, persistence, and patience needed when engaging in advocacy efforts. Each interviewee across cases considered policy advocacy to be part of their job, whether sharing their interests in policy like Paige, and thus, building capacity for policy engagement is important to the field.

Each level of advocacy demonstrates how stakeholders, despite varying scales and scopes of their efforts, have a shared mission of improving quality physical education, yet this is most prevalent at the district and state levels in which strong coalitions were built upon a unified vision. Collective action, though it looked different within each story, was an overlapping strategy to be effective in advocacy efforts. Collective action was identified as an effective advocacy strategy by Mitchell et al. (2021) to increase awareness of physical education policy and work to stimulate change, recognizing that the creation and implementation of robust policies require a collective effort. From engaging parents and communities to promote the impact of quality physical education programming at Alex's school, to gathering parents and community members at school board meetings in Nancy's district, to establishing a large, diverse formalized coalition to draft a bill that would be signed into law to impact policy at the state-level, collective action through coalition-building was imperative.

Related to a shared mission and vision, while each stakeholder may have a different perspective and approach, all involved prioritize the K-12 learner, often using the phrase “doing what is best for kids.” Across all cases, especially with consideration to the COVID-19 pandemic, stakeholders highlighted connections between quality physical education and mental health, the link between academic achievement and engagement in physical activity, and support for the whole child more broadly. While this message was likely tailored to their audience as well, advocates in all three stories leveraged both evidence and storytelling as effective strategies. Advocates such as van der Mars (2018) have called for increased assessment and accountability to demonstrate evidence for student outcomes, which in the past have relied on academic achievement scores as opposed to subject-area-specific outcomes. Consistent with this notion is Alex’s work to collect heart rate data and compare it to academic test scores as a strategy to advocate for both physical education and physical activity more broadly, illustrating the academic link to physical activity using local data from within his own school. From Alex’s efforts comparing heart rate data and test scores to showing alarming statistics regarding mental health challenges among teens at the district level, to showing current research to illuminate the disparities of access to quality physical education across the state, evidence was critical to provide advocacy support. In addition to evidence, storytelling was also used in all cases and was most impactful when told by children, and when coupled with evidence, noted as an effective way to impact public policy (Crow & Jones, 2018). While Alex often narrated stories about the impact of physical education on children, both Samantha and Susan were able to share stories about the impact of Alex’s physical education program on their own children, from a parent’s perspective. For instance, though Samantha spoke from the lens of an administrator during much of her interview, she shared how Alex has positively influenced her daughter to join the running

club, alongside other physical activity opportunities because he had “taken her under his wing.” Reflecting on the fact that her daughter wasn’t “athletic” or into sports before attending that school, she shared that this is due to Alex genuinely caring for her and connecting with her. In addition, Nancy, Janelle, and Paula discussed the influence of having parents share stories at board meetings, in addition to including quotes from students in advocacy letters. According to macro-level advocates, while all testimonies were important, the stories the children told when testifying were most impactful as legislators ultimately want to hear from their constituents.

Other concepts that were similar across cases include the need to secure funding (e.g., grants), utilizing multiple modes of communication for advocacy at various levels (e.g., emails, letters, social media), and knowing who the key players are. Aside from building rapport with colleagues and key players, leveraging the support of someone knowledgeable about the policy process while learning through active engagement was also essential. This makes sense as Lorusso et al. (2020) pointed out, policy engagement is largely dependent on knowledge of the policy process. Though not relevant to the micro-level, the notion of having a voice or individual who is knowledgeable about the process and engages regularly with leadership and/or legislators was prevalent at the meso- and macro-level. District-level advocates leaned on Julia for guidance in pushing for the full-time curriculum facilitator position and spoke to the importance of having Nancy in that position to serve as the voice for physical educators in the district. Similarly, every interviewee at the macro-level, including Kelsey, shared that the passage of the physical education pilot bill and advocacy efforts more broadly would not have been as effective, or potentially even possible, without the presence of an advocacy consultant. Knowledge of key players and appropriate steps to take to advocate is important, but those steps are not always clear, and the landscape is ever-changing.

Paige made an important point when speaking to important dispositions of an advocate, sharing that stakeholders need to be okay with some of the discomfort that lies when navigating unknowns, as this work is nuanced. Adaptation and flexibility are crucial, however, when asked about the ways in which the story of the physical education pilot can inform future work in helping to develop future policy actors, she shared that some of these attributes are tough to teach. The qualities demonstrated by advocates across these stories may not be able to be taught, but perhaps authentic experiences, mentorship, and professional development can aid in the socialization process (Weaver, 2024). One of the purposes of this dissertation was to explore the stories of physical education stakeholders' policy work, aiming to uncover the nuances and complexities of the policy processes. Seeing as teaching through cases can be an effective strategy for learning about public policy (Crow & Jones, 2018; Jones et al., 2022; Morrison & Lorusso, 2023; Weaver, 2024), the narratives within this study, in compilation with the collection of future stories, can serve as a stepping stone toward building capacity for policy work in the field.

Differences

While there were certainly common patterns and themes that arose across micro-, meso-, and macro-level cases, each story is unique not only due to its specific context and level but also to the advocacy strategies applied. For example, Alex and other interviewees within the micro-level story made no mention of resistance, and each person spoke about the positive support from the administration as well as classroom teachers. Perhaps the presence of this support is due to Alex's efforts to educate stakeholders within his building, in addition to building strong relationships within the school and the school community. It is also worth mentioning that Alex

teaches in an elementary setting, in which he is the only physical educator within the building, as opposed to secondary settings where there generally are teams of physical educators.

Conversely, at the district level, advocates encountered administrative resistance, particularly with the introduction of the graduation flexibility proposal. Beyond advocating to oppose the new proposal, in her interview Janelle describes feelings of frustration and discouragement as she observes her colleagues who do not always follow appropriate practices for teaching physical education, alluding to the many changes needed within the field, even when physical education is being taught by a licensed teacher, to move beyond marginalization. Though Alex did not encounter the same challenges, he emphasized the need to stay optimistic, especially when it came to attending professional development opportunities. Sharing the ways he approaches meetings that have nothing to do with physical education points to this optimism as he believes physical educators should look at the opportunities to integrate other content areas into the curricula and educate colleagues about how they can integrate concepts from physical education into the classroom.

On a similar note, keeping the “E” in “PE” was also a common concept, yet it looked different across levels. For instance, Alex shared the ways he uses the additional physical activity opportunities in his school not to replace physical education or diminish the continued need to address quantity, but he highlights the benefits of learning through movement to promote and enhance efforts that advocate for physical education within the current reality of his situation. Administrators like Samantha and teachers like Susan were also able to speak to the difference between physical education and physical activity, perhaps due to Alex’s efforts. On the other hand, district-level advocates shared the battles of needing to consistently advocate for the difference between physical activity and physical education. For example, Tyler shared that high

school students can get physical education experiences through club sports in the community, and Julia spoke to the misunderstanding as she shared that others within the district have a preconception that physical education is just running around. Lastly, at the macro level, the physical education bill, in some ways, turned into a physical activity bill. Eve spoke about her worries that the use of physical activity-related research to serve as supporting evidence for the physical education pilot bill may have been detrimental, potentially confusing legislators about the differences between physical education and physical activity. Related to the need to tailor the message to the stakeholder/audience, this notion was extensively present at the macro level. Speaking of physical activity-related research and obesity prevention, Paige pointed out that while her values and perspective about the goals of physical education do not necessarily align with prioritizing moderate-to-vigorous physical activity in every lesson, she and the team amplified this message, especially when speaking to legislators who may be more supportive if they view fitness of utmost importance and an avenue for helping to prepare students for the military.

Most prevalent at the macro-level, knowing the pulse of the legislature and the importance of timing was most critical, perhaps unique to state-level advocacy more so than at district and school levels. Additionally, highlighting the disparities in access to quality physical education was visibly more at the macro-level, serving as the driving force to initiating the physical education pilot in an effort to work toward state mandates. Finally, unique to the macro-level was the implementation and execution in carrying out the bill as intended, though policy implementation at all levels in the United States system remains a challenge with a lack of accountability (van der Mars et al., 2021).

Implications for Future Policy Work

There are several implications of these findings regarding the future of policy work in physical education. First, there is a need for continued resilience and innovation in physical education advocacy. And second, leveraging personal stories supported by evidence in combination with a strategic plan and a strong coalition, stakeholders must begin building capacity for policy engagement. Implications and suggestions for policy work and future research are discussed at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels.

Micro-Level Implications

Since policy is enacted by teachers, they are key policy actors and primary agents for policy implementation (Day et al., 2007; Marttinen & Beighle, 2024). Alex's story of being a "movement specialist" extends beyond the typical role of a physical educator in not only incorporating non-traditional and interdisciplinary content within the curricula, but in going above and beyond to write grants and garner support for a plethora of physical activity experiences for students, staff, and the community. This case serves as a foundational narrative to learn from in the building-level policy advocacy space. In the school setting, particularly within a state with localized control and no mandates for physical education at any grade level, Alex's optimistic outlook and hard work in establishing a holistic, data-informed program illustrate how physical educators navigating similar challenges (e.g., overcrowding, scheduling barriers, limited space) can work to garner support within their building. While the physical activity initiatives and active learning are certainly not a replacement for physical education, this story exemplifies how to leverage collaborative relationships and strategic efforts to use these opportunities to advocate for the impact of a physical education program.

In the reality of a situation like Alex's, advocacy and change are certainly needed to work toward increasing the quantity of physical education, yet this story sheds light on innovative strategies to get kids moving while educating others about the goals and impact of physical education, when current policies are sub-par. Moreover, when implementing physical activity opportunities before, during, and after the school day as well as components of staff involvement and family and community engagement, it is important to prioritize a quality physical education as the foundation (Carson et al., 2020). Alex has built a quality physical education program, and his initiatives illuminate that for stakeholders in the school and school community. Alex's identity as a "movement specialist" resonates with the concept of physical activity leadership, recognizing the need for students to accumulate time spent engaged in physical activity beyond physical education (McKenzie & Lounsbery, 2013). Further, proponents of the HOPE model would argue to embrace these efforts as they contribute to advocacy efforts, in partnership with public health professionals (Sallis et al., 2012). Regardless of one's perspective related to the goals of physical education, there are lessons to be learned from successful policy advocacy stories, like Alex's.

Meso-Level Implications

Implications of the meso-level story stem from both the process of advocating for the full-time curriculum facilitator as well as the navigation through challenges after Nancy was hired. Regardless, the power of collective action shines through in advocacy efforts to develop the position and remain necessary as they work to overcome other challenges, such as opposition to the graduation flexibility requirement. Lessons learned within this story can be useful to highlight the need and impact of having a full-time curriculum facilitator to serve as the voice for physical educators at the district level. This journey of passionate and dedicated stakeholders like

Nancy, Janelle, and Paula persistently pushing for someone with specialized content knowledge to serve in this role sheds light on various aspects that are important to understand for future efforts, such as learning the appropriate order of steps to follow (e.g., an email, a letter on behalf of district teachers, speaking at a school board meeting) and determining who the key players are. Physical educators in a similar position, as well as those preparing future teachers can benefit from such case stories as a way to uncover some of the complexities and successful strategies of the policy advocacy process at the district level.

Macro-Level Implications

The story of the physical education pilot illustrates the effectiveness of broad coalition-building and legislative engagement (e.g., state advocacy days at the Capital, testimonials) in pursuing statewide policy change. The formation of a diverse advocacy coalition, driven by a shared mission to enhance the quality and accessibility of physical education, points to the importance of collaborative efforts and strategic planning in navigating policy processes. While this statewide initiative serves as a testament to the potential of collective action to influence decisions and advance the agenda for quality physical education at the state level, interviewees emphasized having the “right people at the right time.” Though exact replication of the project might not be possible in other states, there are certainly successes and strategies to learn from these efforts.

Aside from building a strong, diverse coalition, Joyce referred to the state’s health and physical education organization as the “vehicle” for this work. In addition, all interviewees shared that they would not have been successful without the help of the state organization’s advocacy consultant, Kelsey. Not only does Kelsey have an educational background in public policy and extensive knowledge about the legislative process, but she also works regularly with

legislators who ultimately make decisions to support the bill, or not. Kelsey was able to schedule last-minute meetings and serve as the voice of the coalition at the Capital, stepping in to advocate at the right times. The relationships Kelsey has with legislators and those that have been built between her, the coalition, and the state organization are incredibly impactful. Thus, other state health and physical education organizations should consider hiring an advocacy consultant to stay updated about the pulse of the legislature and bills coming through that impact the field and serve as a liaison for communications, scheduling meetings for state-level advocacy days, etc. Additionally, securing funding through a like-minded organization helped to incentivize Kelsey, compensate Joyce for her efforts in planning and facilitating the project, and reimburse substitutes for coverage to allow K-12 educators to attend advocacy days. Ultimately, these macro-level efforts were extremely successful in passing legislation to improve the quality and access to physical education and decrease the disparities due to localized control.

Summary

Across these levels, in addition to the lessons and implications above, the use of data and stories to be persuasive and effective in advocacy efforts shines through. Learning how to use these strategies and other approaches to advocacy efforts at the school, district, and state level is something that is lacking in professional development for in-service teachers and teacher preparation programs, contributing to the field's lack of policy engagement and neglect (van der Mars et al., 2021). Seeing as physical education pre-service teachers are the future of the profession, integrating aspects of policy advocacy education into teacher preparation programs is a logical and needed endeavor (Marttinen & Beighle, 2024; Morrison & Lorusso, 2023; Penney, 2016; van der Mars et al., 2021). As PETE faculty serve an important role in preparing future professionals for their teaching responsibilities, they also hold responsibility for preparing them

to engage in policy advocacy (Marttinen & Beighle, 2024; Penney, 2016; van der Mars et al., 2021). Policy education integration into PETE programs has further been recommended by Lorusso et al. (2020) noting that many physical educators do not feel prepared to engage in policy work. However, Lorusso et al. (2020) noted a lack of preparation for policy engagement among physical educators, highlighting the need for integrating policy education into PETE programs.

As mentioned previously, stories are one way to learn about public policy (Lorusso et al., 2023; Scanlon et al., 2022). Weaver (2024) also recommended real-world cases as an effective approach to teaching about public policy. While practical application and authentic policy-related experiences are also critical for learning how to be an effective advocate, learning through cases can help to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practice (Weaver, 2024). Physical education teacher education programs and others seeking to provide professional development in the policy space should consider the use of case stories to equip future policy actors while integrating meaningful discussions and reflections that promote critical thinking. Thus, the integration of case stories in teacher preparation can better prepare physical educators for their roles as policy actors to ultimately work toward reversing policy neglect and foster a deeper understanding of policy work and its implications for the field.

In addition to integrating policy education into their teacher preparation programs, PETE faculty, as well as other scholars in related fields, should consider policy work in their research lines. Since policies impact nearly all aspects of physical education (UNESCO, 2014), increasing policy literacy is critical. This dissertation aimed to capture stories, while also exploring the presence and role of storytelling in advocacy efforts. Therefore, future researchers can consider continuing to collect stories through narrative inquiry and case study methods through an NPF

lens to explore how stories impact decision-making across micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. Future research could also examine how K-12 teachers and PETE faculty engage with policy, their introduction and socialization to the policy space, and the effectiveness of using case studies to prepare them as future physical education policy actors.

Limitations

Like any study, this dissertation was not without limitations. Following recruitment steps to identify exemplary cases of policy work, the cases that were selected were diverse in terms of gender and location but lacked racial diversity. Considering the study's location and demographics, the state is known for its predominantly white population, likely influencing the composition of participants across cases. Additionally, though participants were made aware via informed consent and interview procedures (see Appendices B and C), there may have been limited candor of participants due to confidentiality concerns. Despite efforts to maintain anonymity, the identities of participants and their organizations might be discernable to informed readers, due to the nature of case study design and public policy work. Consequently, this awareness could have influenced the openness of participants and depth of stories.

Conclusion

Though each story and context differed, the role of resilience, innovation, and strategic advocacy for improving the quality and access to physical education were emphasized in the findings. The role of storytelling in policy work was explored within the stories themselves, as well as from an analytic perspective in determining the ways in which these case stories can inform future policy work through an NPF lens (Jones et al., 2022). Recognizing storytelling as a powerful vehicle to engage stakeholders to impact policy outcomes (Shanahan et al., 2015), PETE programs should consider integrating the use of case stories to shed light on the raw

details of the legislative and advocacy processes through real-world examples so physical educators can be better prepared to engage in the necessary work that impacts the field.

Given the critical role policies play in providing the foundation for physical education across local, state, and national levels (van der Mars et al., 2021), physical education professionals must build capacity for increased policy advocacy engagement. Increasing policy literacy for stakeholders to have a deeper understanding of how policies influence the field is important, but active engagement in the policy-making process to ensure physical education remains a priority for schools is critical. This dissertation can serve as a call to the field, urging physical education stakeholders to consider their role as policy actors themselves, and increased preparation and capacity-building for policy work in the field.

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APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



Date: 11/30/2023

Principal Investigator: Lisa Paulson

Committee Action: **IRB EXEMPT DETERMINATION – New Protocol**

Action Date: 11/30/2023

Protocol Number: [2310053500](#)

Protocol Title: Voices of Change: Exploring the Narratives of Physical Education Stakeholders: Policy Work in the United States

Expiration Date:

The University of Northern Colorado Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol and determined your project to be exempt under 45 CFR 46.104(d)(702) for research involving

Category 2 (2018): EDUCATIONAL TESTS, SURVEYS, INTERVIEWS, OR OBSERVATIONS OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR. Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: (i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7).

You may begin conducting your research as outlined in your protocol. Your study does not require further review from the IRB, unless changes need to be made to your approved protocol.

As the Principal Investigator (PI), you are still responsible for contacting the UNC IRB office if and when:



- You wish to deviate from the described protocol and would like to formally submit a modification request. Prior IRB approval must be obtained before any changes can be implemented (except to eliminate an immediate hazard to research participants).
- You make changes to the research personnel working on this study (add or drop research staff on this protocol).
- At the end of the study or before you leave The University of Northern Colorado and are no longer a student or employee, to request your protocol be closed. *You cannot continue to reference UNC on any documents (including the informed consent form) or conduct the study under the auspices of UNC if you are no longer a student/employee of this university.
- You have received or have been made aware of any complaints, problems, or adverse events that are related or possibly related to participation in the research.

If you have any questions, please contact the Interim IRB Administrator, Chris Saxton, at 970-702-5427 or via e-mail at chris.saxton@unco.edu. Additional information concerning the requirements for the protection of human subjects may be found at the Office of Human Research Protection website - <http://hhs.gov/ohrp/> and <https://www.unco.edu/research/research-integrity-and-compliance/institutional-review-board/>.

Sincerely,
Michael Aldridge
Interim IRB Administrator

University of Northern Colorado: FWA00000784

APPENDIX B
EMAIL RECRUITMENT LETTER



EMAIL RECRUITMENT LETTER

Title of Research Study: Voices of Change: Exploring the Narratives Physical Education Stakeholders' Policy Work in the United States

Greetings _____,

My name is Lisa Paulson. I am currently a PhD candidate in the Physical Education and Physical Activity Leadership Program at the University of Northern Colorado. My research is focused on exploring physical education stakeholders' experiences and engagement in policy in the United States. I would like to invite you to participate in my study.

If you participate, you will be asked to take part in semi-structured interviews which will provide me with in-depth information pertaining to your engagement in physical education policy and/or advocacy. Primary interviews will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and follow-up interviews may last 10 to 30 minutes. I will also ask you to help me identify or provide relevant documents and artifacts related to your policy work. Interviews will be conducted individually and/or in focus groups.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please reply to this email and I will follow up with more information.

Thank you,

Lisa Paulson

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT FORM



INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Title of Research Study: Voices of Change: Exploring the Narratives of Physical Education Stakeholders' Policy Work in the United States

Researcher(s): Lisa Paulson
Phone Number: (xxx) xxx-xxxx
email: lisa.paulson@unco.edu

Research Advisor: Brian Dauenhauer
Phone Number: (970) 351-1202
email: brian.dauenhauer@unco.edu

Procedures: Hello, my name is Lisa Paulson and I am currently a PhD candidate in the Physical Education and Physical Activity Leadership Program at the University of Northern Colorado. My research is focused on exploring physical education stakeholders' experiences and engagement in policy in the United States. I would like to invite you to participate in my study. If you participate, you will be asked to take part in semi-structured interviews which will provide me with in-depth information pertaining to your engagement in physical education policy and/or advocacy. Primary interviews will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and follow-up interviews may last 10 to 30 minutes. I will also ask you to help me identify or provide relevant documents and artifacts related to your policy work.

Appropriate steps will be undertaken to foster confidentiality by using pseudonyms for participants and associated schools, organizations, or institutions. Yet, due to the nature of case study design and the public nature of policy work, it may be difficult to maintain anonymity, and it is possible that your identity and the identity of your organization may be apparent to knowledgeable readers of resulting reports. This constitutes the greatest risk associated with participation in this study- the potential for loss of anonymity. There are no direct benefits for involvement in this study besides the potential of contributing to new knowledge and future policy education efforts.

Questions: If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact Lisa Paulson at (218) 491-3145 or via email at lisa.paulson@unco.edu. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the University of Northern Colorado IRB at irb@unco.edu or 970-351-1910.

Voluntary Participation: Please understand that your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation, you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.

If you decide to participate, your completion of the research procedures indicates your consent. Please keep this form for your records.

APPENDIX D
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE



SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Date:

Time: TBD by participants (main interviews ~60-90 minutes; follow-up interviews ~10-30 minutes)

Setting: Virtual, via Zoom

Purpose:

- a) Gather stakeholders' stories about engagement in policy work in the United States
- b) Determine the extent to which storytelling impacted policy advocacy efforts
- c) Understand how stakeholders' stories can aid in teaching about policy/advocacy and impact future policy work
- d) Gather supporting documents and artifacts to support a comprehensive understanding of stories
- e) Determine if follow-up interviews are needed with other stakeholders

Format: Semi-structured (interview guide approach); audio recorded; main questions, probes, and follow-ups.

- *Detailed-oriented probes* – who, where, what, when, and how?
- *Elaboration probes* – Tell me more about that. A bit more detail?
- *Clarification probes* – I want to understand, what do you mean by?
- *Contrast probes* – How does x compare with y?

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to speak with me about your engagement in physical education policy.

I know you have experience engaging in policy advocacy through [insert topic/initiative]. I will be asking you some questions to share more about that story and about your experience. I ask that you answer questions as honestly as possible. Appropriate steps will be undertaken to foster confidentiality by using pseudonyms for participants and associated schools, organizations, or institutions. Yet, due to the nature of case study design and the public nature of policy work, it may be difficult to maintain anonymity, and your identity and the identity of your organization may be apparent to knowledgeable readers of the resulting reports. If, at any time, you want to

pass on a question, or have me turn off the recorders, just simply ask. Thank you, again, I truly appreciate your participation.

Questions & Prompts:

1. Please tell me about yourself.
 - Name of your institution/school/organization, title/role, physical education experience, etc.
 - How long have you been involved in physical education (if applicable) and what motivated you to pursue this work?

2. Can you describe some of your involvement in policy and/or advocacy work in physical education? I'm familiar with your involvement in "XX"... can you tell me more about that specific work?
 - What were key events, emotions, or insights that stand out about your experience? Successes/failures?
 - Who were the other key players involved (e.g., representatives from other organizations)
 - How long did it take to impact change, if any?

3. Did you encounter barriers or challenges? If so, what were they and how did you attempt to overcome them?
 - What personal knowledge, skills, or dispositions helped you address the challenges you encountered?
 - How did you know if and/or when you were successful?

4. Can you identify any strategies you have used in your policy advocacy work?
 - Did you provide any data or evidence to support your efforts? If so, to what extent do you think it impacted the process?
 - Did you use/tell stories in your policy advocacy efforts? If so, to what extent do you think it impacted the process?

5. What/who has influenced your policy advocacy work at this level?
 - What prompted your interest in this work?
 - What problems did you observe that led you to advocate?
 - Did you learn about policy advocacy in any of your previous coursework?
 - Did you have a mentor who influenced you to engage in policy advocacy?

6. How do you think your experience/story can inform future policy work?
 - What do you think are key factors that encourage or hinder physical education stakeholders' engagement in policy?
 - What advice or recommendations would you propose to lower the barrier to entry toward enhancing policy engagement in physical education?
7. Is there anything else you'd like to share?
8. Lastly, do you have any suggestions for policy documents or artifacts that can deepen my understanding of your policy/advocacy efforts?
 - Is there anyone else you think I should talk with to deepen my understanding of this initiative/story, that hasn't been discussed yet?

APPENDIX E
AUDIT TRAIL

AUDIT TRAIL

Audit Trail ☆ 📁 ☁

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G4 | 📄 Obtained

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Case Level	Source Title	Data Type	Date	Time (Mountain)	Interview Length	Data Needed/Obtained	Notes
2	Micro	Hometown Hero News Article	Artifact	1/7/2024	N/A	N/A	Obtained	Example